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A Father's Curse and A Daughter's Sacrifice.

Mrs Bray.

A FATHER'S CURSE

AND

A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE.

Mrs. Bray's Novels and Romances.

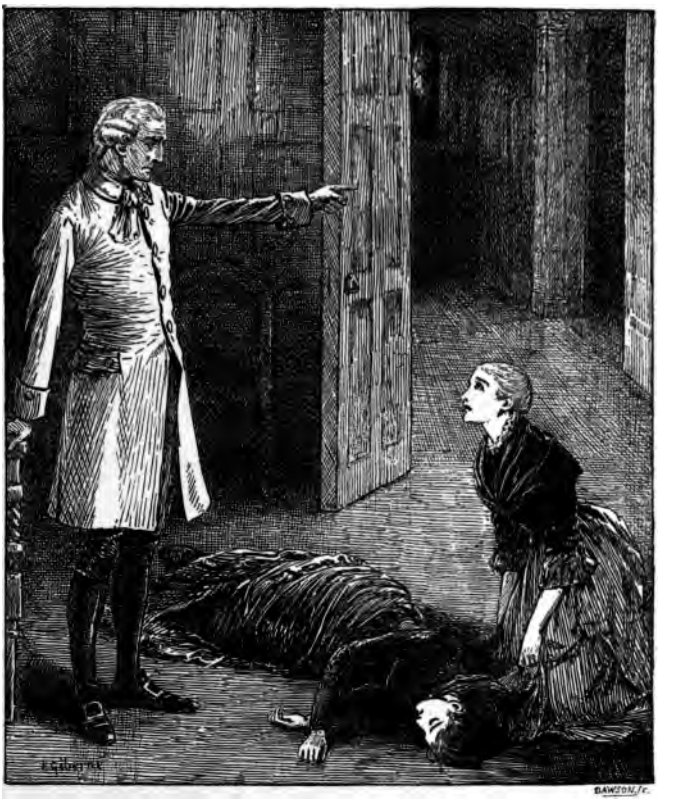
THE WHITE HOODS.
DE FOIX; A ROMANCE OF BEARN.
THE PROTESTANT.
THE TALBA, OR THE MOOR OF PORTUGAL.

ROMANCES OF THE WEST.

FITZ OF FITZ-FORD.
WARLEIGH, OR THE FATAL OAK.
COURTENAY OF WALREDDON.
TRELAWNY OF TRELAWNE.
HENRY DE POMEROY.
HARTLAND FOREST, AND ROSETEAGUE.

MISCELLANEOUS TALES.

TRIALS OF THE HEART.
A FATHER'S CURSE, AND A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE.



Frontispiece. Page 65.

A FATHER'S CURSE

A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE.

[redacted]

NEW AND REVISED

LONDON: CHATTO &
LIMITED.
1881



A FATHER'S CURSE

AND

A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE.

BY

MRS. BRAY.

NEW AND REVISED EDITION.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL,
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A FATHER'S CURSE.

CHAPTER I.

The grief that on my quiet preys,
 That rends my heart, that checks my tongue,
I fear will last me all my days,
 But feel it will not last me long.
SIR JOHN MOORE.

AT the instance of one to whom I am bound by the closest ties of gratitude and affection, whose request must ever be to me a command, I have undertaken to record some remarkable circumstances respecting that family (more happy in their worldly fortunes than in themselves) with which, though in a dependent station, I have been connected ever since I was born. But, in order to show what were my opportunities of becoming acquainted with many things unknown to the world at large, I must begin with giving some account of my parents as well as myself.

My mother was born under melancholy circumstances, as she lost hers at the hour of her birth. She was the only child of a minister of the Established Church, who held no benefice, and, after having served two parishes in Devonshire as a curate, on a very small stipend, for nearly fifteen years, died suddenly, leaving my poor mother, then a child of five years old, with no other prospect of provision than that promised to the fatherless, who, by the trust of good and Christian parents, are committed to a heavenly Father's care. In this instance, it did not fail the orphan of the poor clergyman. For the patron of one of the small livings alluded to above, a worthy and a rich man, hearing that the curate,

who, in the non-residence of the incumbent, had so long served the neighbouring church of ————, had died suddenly in the morning, and that there was no one in the house but a very aged woman to take care of his little girl, caused her to be brought to his own mansion before night, and so ordered matters that he never parted from her till, on the marriage of his daughter, twenty years afterwards, she followed her young mistress, more as a humble companion than as a servant, to her new home.

My mother, from her education, was not altogether unfit for such a station; as the kind-hearted old Squire Gould had given her very good schooling in her youth. She could read, write, spell, and cast accounts, as well as any gentlewoman of her day. Indeed, so well taught was she, that the Squire himself always had her called into the parlour every morning, to read aloud to him the chapters and psalms of the day; and of an evening she very often read him to sleep. She was so expert, too, with her needle, that, as long as he lived, she always worked for him a new pair of ruffles, and presented them to him on his birthday, as a token of grateful respect. Among other things, she was so well instructed under the housekeeper, that one principal reason for the old gentleman consenting to part with his favourite Hannah (so was my mother called) arose from his wish that his daughter, who was a very fine young lady, and knew nothing about housekeeping, might have the benefit of her advice and assistance when first entering on the duties of a married life: and, though my mother was then not more than twenty-five, she was sedate beyond her years, and as steady as most women are at forty. Her young mistress, who both esteemed and loved her, married Hector Fountaine, Esquire; a gentleman of a large landed estate, who lived in his family mansion, Fountaine Hall, in the parish of ———, about ten miles from Exeter; and my mother, in less than two years after that event, married the house-steward, and never left the family, where she was ever treated like a humble but much valued friend.

It may readily be supposed how great were her opportunities of knowing everything that happened affecting the family to which she was attached. I was born about a year after the marriage of my parents: Mrs. Fountaine condescended to stand sponsor for me at the font, gave me her own name of Alice, and I was reared in her house.

I know not how it was brought about, that so beautiful

and accomplished a lady as my godmother came to be the wife of Squire Fountaine. There never could have been a pair more unlike each other in temper or in feeling: the wife so gentle and amiable; the husband so rough and obdurate. But I suppose it was on account of his great wealth, and the grandeur of both families, that the match was made up without the parties themselves having much to do with it.

The Fountaine family, though of French origin, had been for many centuries settled in Devon, where they intermarried with other families of note, and were respected as much on account of their character for munificence and loyalty as for their wealth and honourable descent. They had, in old times, both served and suffered for King Charles in the Civil Wars; and the principal member, indeed the head of the family, with whom my story commences, though living under the rule of a Hanoverian sovereign, was, not without cause, deemed a Jacobite in heart. Indeed, so strongly suspected was he of having some share in the plots of those Devonshire gentlemen who were suddenly seized and conveyed to the Tower for their busy intrigues for the Pretender in the West of England, that he very narrowly escaped an arrest on the occasion; and, for many years after, was looked upon with a jealous eye by the Government and by its emissaries in Devon.

It is, however, with his private, and not with his political character that I have to do: I shall, therefore, here content myself with saying, Mr. Fountaine was one of that rude race of country gentlemen who, alas! were by no means uncommon, especially in the more remote counties of England, about the time of his standing. His education had been of the roughest and most neglected kind. His prospects, as sole heir to a large estate, rendered a profession unnecessary in the opinion of an uninformed and fox-hunting father, and made all studies and acquirements of an intellectual nature equally unnecessary; so that, in his youth, he was never taught more than a country pedagogue, who, by a foolishly fond mother, was forbidden to use the rod, could prevail with him to learn. He never went to college; early imbibed a taste for field-sports and horse-racing, and for the company of those devoted to such pursuits; took no interest in county matters, unless they were of a turbulent kind, in opposition to the house of Hanover; and finally, his father

dying about the period when he attained the age of twenty-one years, he came into the possession of a great estate, over which he was left the uncontrolled master, and accomplished in nothing but a knowledge of horses and hounds. He was largely endowed with that sort of boisterous energy which, in a man of fortune, carries its point among weaker spirits, particularly in the country: and, ruling and reigning the acknowledged leader among his sporting neighbours of all kinds and degrees, they (ever welcome to the rude but plentiful hospitality of his house) yielded to him the pre-eminence both at home and abroad over the punch-bowl, or in the hunting-field.

And yet, with all this, Mr. Fountaine was not a man to be despised. Nature had intended him for something far better than the Squire Western of his day. She had given him a strong and clear understanding, the most ardent feelings, passions no less vehement, and a resolution which, whether rightly or wrongly directed, nothing could shake. Had he but received the advantages of that wholesome training which the most vigorous minds, like the most luxuriant plants, absolutely require, such a character, in a person of his fortune and station, might have become a blessing to the tenantry that called him lord, to his own immediate family, and indeed to all around him. Education would have supplied a becoming object of pursuit, in which his naturally strong intellect would have found an ample field for its exercise. His ardent feelings would have been softened and refined, and his passions subjected to the control of reason, whilst the obdurate resolution and blind obstinacy of his temper might have been trained into a becoming fortitude and resolution in the maintenance of moral and religious duty.

Such, in all probability, would have been the effects of a good education with Mr. Fountaine. But, as it was, his mind, like the sluggard's garden, displayed, from total neglect, little other as the product of its naturally luxuriant soil than the rankest weeds; and, whatever might have been his minor distinctions, his great characteristic was tyranny; for, both in his pleasures and his passions, he was a despot. Of his principles, those which are called political were perhaps the least offensive, although they were by many termed treasonable towards the ruling powers; for he verily believed in his heart that no Acts of Parliament could set aside the descendants of that King Charles, for whom his own grand-

father had bled, and in whose cause the Fountaine family, by fine and sequestration, had formerly forfeited no inconsiderable part of their great wealth.

Such was the man to whom the manners of the times, and the authority of superiors, gave so elegant and refined a creature as Mrs. Fountaine. That a woman of her nice feelings and perceptions could be happy with such a man was impossible; but so exemplary was she in the discharge of all her duties, whether moral or religious, that she forbore all complaint, treated her husband with an observance which procured for her universal respect, and even from himself some consideration, and bore the yoke of so unequal a marriage with a quiet and a gentle melancholy, that touched the hearts of all who knew her in her earlier days, and remembered of how lively a disposition she had been, before she exchanged the home of a worthy and affectionate father for that of a coarse and tyrannical husband. Not that Mr. Fountaine was altogether indifferent to his wife: far from it. He really loved her with strong passion; but his feelings towards her were selfish. He was jealous even of her friendships, for he could not bear to suspect that the creature he preferred to all others should value any one so much as himself; and, like all men of strong affections and tyrannical tempers, he expected that exclusive and devoted attachment from another which he took no pains to deserve.

The mansion which called Mr. Fountaine master was one of ancient days; even the most modern part was of the time of Elizabeth or James the First. It was a large, substantial, heavy moorstone building, that had nothing elegant and very little handsome about it except the windows and a noble flight of steps which led into the hall. A pair of costly, open-worked iron gates (leading from the public road through the park) gave entrance to a long avenue of fine old elm and beech trees which terminated in front of the courtyard. The hall was striking from its height and extent, but the apartments generally were ill-proportioned and gloomy. The principal ones, decorated with carved oak panelling and almost black by time, were hung with tapestry and old pictures, nearly as dark as the wood itself from age; and, as neither Mr. Fountaine nor his father before him were fond of the least change, the old furniture got dingy and shabby from use and decay, and very little new was added to give relief. The most recent pictures were of the time of Queen Anne,

smiling gentlemen in full-bottomed wigs, with nosegays in their button-holes, and simpering ladies in sacks and hoops, with crooks in their hands and lambs at their feet, represented the husbands or the bachelors, the wives or spinsters, of the Fountaine family, in the pastoral characteristics of portraiture so much the fashion of the day in which they sat for their pictures. A few bluff old warriors, in breastplates and gauntlets of steel, or in the buff coats, large boots, and morions of the time of Charles the First, appeared among them; whilst some pieces of ancient armour still hung on the walls; but these were exceptions, as by far the greater number of portraits, and nearly all the ornamental parts and furniture of the Hall, were of King William or Queen Anne's time, and nothing could be more clumsy or ugly.

Without doors, where nature prevailed, the objects were of far greater interest. Many noble oaks, some of very high antiquity, spreading beeches and lofty elms, with a long sweep of the finest turf, kept in the nicest order by the deer grazing upon it, presented that scene of shade, verdure, and beauty, so peculiar to the homes of the country gentry and the aristocracy of England. The river Exe ran through part of the grounds; and the grey and weather-beaten tower of the adjacent church, with a few of the white cottages of the village, situated at the extremity of the domain, could be seen through the trees, in the openings of the wooded landscape. Beyond arose some of those green hills of Devon, picturesque in their forms, and affording the most pleasing finish to the picture.

At the back of the mansion stood the various gardens. These communicated by more than one gate with the park, that in every direction surrounded the house. The pleasure-garden presented a direct contrast to the natural scene of beauty beyond. It displayed all that stiffness and artificial style which Le Notre had rendered celebrated at Versailles in the time of Louis the Fourteenth; and which was duly imitated, and rendered even a little more ugly, by the clumsiness of imitation in England. Le Notre was not merely copied in clipped hedges of laurel and yew, in leaden pots holding orange-trees, in statues standing everlastingly on one leg, and in flower-beds running like serpents through walks of bright gravel, but also in the very pride of the garden—a fountain! The one in question represented Venus holding herself erect in a shell, which served her for a car,

drawn by a couple of dolphins; whilst half-a-dozen leaden Cupids spouted water all over her from the arrows, or what not, they held in their hands, as they sat perched on the backs of huge frogs on the margin of the circular basin. This fancy (imported from France, and not very ably executed by a Dutch artist, who came over in the train of King William) had cost the then head of the house of Fountaine, who introduced it, more than one thousand pounds; and, from that time it became a grand piece of family pride. The spouting waters were, in fact, a perpetual play upon the family name. Little did he who constructed it think that, in less than a century after, it was destined to be the witness of a scene the most distressing and humiliating to the pride of his descendants. But I will not anticipate.

Mr. Fountaine, whose share of pride was not a whit less than that of any one of his predecessors, earnestly wished for a son to inherit his great estate, and to carry on the family name to his posterity. But, as if his proud spirit was destined to be thwarted in the dearest point, his wife brought him successively three daughters, but no son. This disappointment grievously affected his already soured temper. And, as he indulged the confident hope of an heir, he was angered almost to frenzy when the faithful Hannah, on each occasion, announced to him that her lady was safely delivered of a fine girl. His feelings, indeed, at length became absolutely morbid on the subject of a son—nay, so embittered were they, that, on the birth of the last girl, he allowed some weeks to pass before he would even see the child, and he would not hear of its christening. At last, as if to punish this unnatural feeling, not only did his wife, who had been seriously affected by his obduracy, become alarmingly ill, but the babe also.

My mother, who, from a union of firmness and good sense, was often led to tell Mr. Fountaine home truths, though in a manner so respectful that she disarmed his anger, or rather prevented it from being awakened, determined now to interfere, and to do what she believed to be necessary and right. Hannah sought Mr. Fountaine; and, although she found him engaged with his friends over the punch-bowl, she gently hinted to him that, unless he would consent to see his child, and give it a father's blessing, as a Christian infant, perhaps Providence would be so displeased that an heir might never be granted to his hopes.

The firm, deferential, yet solemn manner in which Hannah addressed him, touching at once the key-note of all his feelings, appeared to strike him with an irresistible conviction. Ever violent and sudden in his determinations, though it was midnight, he caused the clergyman to be called out of his bed; made the doctor, who was carousing with him, throw the punch out of the window; had the bowl in which it had stood washed and filled with water, and, vowing he would not move from the head of that table till the child was christened, insisted that Hannah should stand godmother for the infant; that the doctor and a country squire who was present should be a pair of godfathers; had the poor sick babe taken from its mother's bosom; and, in this mad fashion, caused it to be baptized by the name of Elizabeth, on the spot. He then made a fresh bowl of punch, in the same vessel that had so lately contained the baptismal water, drank the child's health with her godfathers', and continued to do so, till the return of day broke up their orgies.

This was the last and the most unfortunate of all Mrs. Fountaine's confinements. She never entirely recovered the shock she then received, though she survived it five years. My mother always thought she might have lived longer had not her decline been hastened by another family disaster, which excited in a very extraordinary degree the anger of Mr. Fountaine.

He had an only sister, some years younger than himself; and had been accustomed to look upon her very much in the same way as the feudal lords looked upon the children to whom they were guardians—as a sort of higher grade of serf or slave, who were never even to think contrary to the will of their masters. Yet to this sister, according to his notions, Mr. Fountaine had shown great kindness. The old gentleman, her late father, had neglected her in his will. Thinking every penny bestowed on a daughter was no better than a robbery on a son, who was to keep up the family name, he left her but a few hundred pounds for her portion. In some measure, therefore, to rectify this injustice, Mr. Fountaine made her a handsome allowance; gave her his favourite mare when cracked in the wind and unfit for his own use, and a silver brocaded silk, so rich that it stood on end, for the assize ball at Exeter. "What could a brother do more?" he would say. "Yet," he added, "so ungrateful was womankind, that the very first time she wore the brocaded gown

she danced with Mr. Thomas Hartwell, a younger son of the Hartwells, of Hartwell House, persons with whom he was at deadly feud;" and not many months after, the laws of England not being quite so feudal as Mr. Fountaine's domestic tyranny would fain make them, this only and much favoured sister, on his refusing his consent, absolutely married the man of her choice, poor though he was, without it; took her clothes and her few hundreds away with her, but left the mare behind for the use of its original master.

Mr. Fountaine, for awhile, raved and threatened, and vowed vengeance on his brother-in-law for running away with his sister, contrary to his will. In vain did Mrs. Fountaine, already in the early stage of consumption, endeavour to mediate and to make peace; nothing could conquer the anger he had conceived against the offenders. At length, however, he considered he exercised a spirit of great Christian forbearance when he finally announced to Mrs. Fountaine that he would no longer quarrel with or upbraid her on his sister's account, having made up his mind never to speak to her or of her more. He kept his word. Yet, though thus absolutely estranged, she lived to see this obduracy of her brother visited with bitter retribution; for, in process of time, Mrs. Hartwell became the mother of three sons, to inherit their father's poverty, whilst the Fountaine estate was left without an heir male.

But this is anticipating. Mrs. Fountaine had a strong conviction of what would be the termination of her illness, and early and devoutly set her house in order, both temporally and spiritually, to prepare for it. Many were the conversations she had with my mother on this most anxious topic; for she thought very much of her children; and so deeply impressed was my mother with all she said, that, being a great mistress of her pen, she made notes of these discourses for her future guidance and direction. From these written memoranda, then, I shall here give some particulars. Mrs. Fountaine, who was a woman of fine taste, had a great fondness for nature. Indeed, in her garden, among her flowers, or in her rambles in the woods, by the river's side, she seemed to seek some consolation for the disappointment of that domestic happiness which no one was more calculated to enjoy, had she been more fortunately married.

She caused to be built for herself a rustic summer-house, amid the verdure and the shade of the beautiful park, in a

spot where it was neighboured by some of the oldest oaks and beech-trees on the estate. A little stream of the purest water, which pursued its murmuring course to the river beyond, ran near it, and through an opening in the wooded glade could be seen the tower of the village church, always a favourite object with Mrs. Fountaine, whose religious turn of mind was marked in all her feelings and perceptions.

To the summer-house, during her last illness, she would often be wheeled in her garden-chair, and there would she have the children brought to her to converse with them and with my mother. One evening she directed my mother to attend her there alone. As her faithful friend approached, she made her sit down by her side, looked affectionately in her face, pressed her hand, and said, as the tears started in her eyes, "O, my dear Hannah, I am sure you love me!"

"Love you!" said my mother, "I could die for you. I am bound to love you next to God himself, for I owe all to you and your good father."

"Ay, Hannah, but I often think it would indeed have sent his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave had he lived to see what I have suffered."

My mother looked surprised; for Mrs. Fountaine was never in the habit of alluding to her domestic griefs, though many had suspected she was sinking as much under them as under her disease.

"Hannah," she continued, "it is not a little thing that would induce me to speak an unkind word of Mr. Fountaine. As a wife, I have borne much; as a wife, I would bear all in silence, and wish that in my grave might be buried every thought of injury; but I am a mother—and a mother's anxiety for her children will not let me die in peace, unless I unburden my heart to you, Hannah—to you, the only creature living from whom I can derive any relief or benefit, by opening all my soul and telling all my fears or hopes for the future, which rest entirely with you." She paused; there was evidently a struggle in her mind—a reluctance to tell all her apprehensions—to speak out. It was, in fact, in her view, the opposition of contending religious obligations—the duty of the wife opposed to the duty of the mother—the last conquered.

"Hannah," she said, "the truth must be spoken; I dread leaving my children to the care of their father. Such an example as they will find in his associates, with no duties,

either moral or religious, impressed upon their young minds. The prospect is a dreadful one for a mother at the hour of approaching death!"

It was indeed a painful picture to be presented, and in such strong colours, by so gentle and unrepining a being as Mrs. Fountaine! Hannah was shocked—shocked because she saw her own worst fears confirmed by her beloved mistress, whose judgment she knew in this respect was unerring.

"Hannah," continued Mrs. Fountaine, "I am deeply distressed to think what I have spoken. But, unless I confessed the truth to you with my whole heart, you would not know the importance of the trust I am about to confide in you. I thank God, I can see hope in you! I believe that a good Providence has placed you near me at this time, and that the service my dear father did you, when you were a fatherless child, will now be repaid to his child, by making you the instrument to preserve her children from the worst of evils—from the evils of moral and religious debasement."

"O! tell me, what can I do to serve you?" said Hannah; "as God shall bear me witness, I will not fail you in the trust you repose in me, unless life should fail me!"

"I believe it," replied Mrs. Fountaine. "Hear me then, Hannah. You have good sense, good principles, and a sufficient education for all the purposes I shall require of you. I have often observed, from the peculiar character of your mind, that you are more fit to deal with Mr. Fountaine than any other person. I am myself too timid, too sensitive, too much alive to what is due to myself from him, to be able to act upon him in a matter where reason is placed in opposition to his will. But you, Hannah, gain an ascendency over him that no equal could achieve. With an equal, his pride is always on the alert; he suspects, and hardens his mind against reason before reason is offered in contradiction to his will. But with you, your manner and station disarm all suspicion of this kind; whilst your strong sense and firmness, adhering to truth and reason, give you a power over Mr. Fountaine that no one else can ever hope to possess. I have seen it in a thousand instances. O, Hannah, when I am gone, will you use this influence for the benefit of my children?"

With tears of affection, with the most grateful sense of the confidence thus reposed in her, Hannah gave Mrs. Fountaine the assurance that she would do all she could to serve

them, and begged her more explicitly and particularly to point out the means.

"The principal means will be by inducing him to give them a good education. If Mr. Fountaine marries again, as I dare say he will, did he choose a worthy woman all might be well for my daughters. But I cannot confide in his choice; he is so much the slave of passion and caprice. Induce him, then, if you can, to let my daughters be placed at some school where the mistress can be relied upon in respect to moral and religious worth. I care little for ornament or accomplishments in their education. At present, he will not hear the mention of a school, because his own sister received a boarding-school education; and to that he attributes her running away with Mr. Hartwell. Martha has a great spirit, but with it much generosity of temper. If kindly treated, I am convinced she will be good and dutiful. If her reason, which is very mature for her age—(she is only, you know, twelve years old)—if her reason be appealed to in any matter of importance, she will not be deaf to its dictates. But I think she has a spirit that tyranny of any sort would not improve."

"I should not fear so much for Miss Martha as for Miss Amy," said Hannah.

"Amy is a very wild girl," replied Mrs. Fountaine, "and wants that strictness of discipline which would injure Martha; because Amy is wilful as well as wild; I fear much for her. But little Elizabeth, I am most anxious for her—the one who I think is most likely to become her father's favourite: she is so lively, so sportive—and, alas, Hannah, so like himself! Hannah, young as she is, I am much mistaken if Elizabeth Fountaine does not inherit, with her father's handsome features, his strong passions, his ardent feelings—his marked disposition, capable of being turned to good or evil, in no common degree. Elizabeth is the child for whom I most fear; and she has by far the quickest parts —a dangerous gift, if ill directed."

"Miss Elizabeth is indeed all you say," said Hannah; "and a pity it would be should she or any of these dear children be lost for want of a good education. Should I be spared I will endeavour to do all you wish me. And yet, I fear, there is little I can do for them. For O, my dear mistress, notwithstanding all you say of my influence with Mr. Fountaine, I am but a dependent; and, if he should take any

resolution about these poor children contrary to what I know would be your wish, how am I to cross him with any hope of prevailing? And O, my dear mistress, I cannot bear the thought that such a one as I am should step into your place to become in a manner the mother of your children."

"And a most kind, and faithful, and worthy guardian should I leave for them, could I but feel certain Mr. Fountaine would let you be so to them. At all events, Hannah, never leave the family. For my sake I know you would bear much, even should trials and hardships arise that I do not now anticipate. Promise me, Hannah, you will never leave the family; and, when I am gone, that you will do all I have pointed out to you, as far as you can do it. Promise me this, and I shall die happier."

Hannah, with many tears and protestations, gave the promise required of her.

This was the last confidential communication ever made to my mother by Mrs. Fountaine on the subject of her children.

CHAPTER II.

He asked no question—all were answered now
By the first glance on that still, marble brow.
It was enough—she died—what recked it how?
The love of youth, the hope of better years,
The only living thing he could not hate,
Was reft at once—and he deserved his fate,
But did not feel it less. The good explore
For peace those realms where guilt can never soar;
The proud, the wayward, who have fixed below
Their joy, and find this earth enough for woe,
Lose in that one their all.

BYRON'S *Corsair*.

NOT many weeks after the conversation I have just mentioned Mrs. Fountaine sank under that insidious disease which by gentle steps had led her to the grave. Mr. Fountaine, whose ideas of sickness and danger were connected with those of great bodily suffering and as great murmurings and complaints, never could be prevailed on to believe, from the gentle and unrepining demeanour of his wife, that she was near her death. He treated her own occasional hints on

the subject as the effects of the megrims and the vapours; and, when the doctor spoke to him in confirmation of her fears, he, who, like most coarse-mannered men, had a particular dislike to all the members of the healing art, to their quiet deportment, and the general serious purpose of their lives, swore the doctor was an ass; that he was making his wife worse, and trying to frighten him, for the sake of getting more fees; and ended by advising her to throw away all the physic, and to try a glass of punch with him instead.

This obstinate persistence in his own opinion only occasioned him that greater shock which ever accompanies the sight of death when it comes upon us by surprise. It was Hannah who had the task of summoning Mr. Fountaine, one day after he had returned from a fox-chase, to attend the last moments of his lady.

He started up from the chair into which he had just thrown himself, and, turning pale as ashes, exclaimed—"Dying! She dying! I will not believe it. It is a lie! I tell you it is all a lie! That foolish doctor has deceived you; she is not dying; she cannot be dying; I can't, I won't believe it! I tell you, it is all that rascally doctor's doing. Why did you not send for Lavington, the only honest doctor in the kingdom! He hates physic, takes none himself, and seldom orders it. But this fellow is from Exeter. I'll go and turn him out. He shall frighten her no more."

"O, sir," said Hannah, "let me entreat you, for the love you bear to my dear lady, do not go to her chamber for such a purpose! She is, indeed, drawing towards her last hour; do not disturb it. Be gentle with her, my dear master. Let her depart in peace."

"Well, well, I will do as you wish." And, like Uncle Toby, Mr. Fountaine swore a deep oath that his wife should not die. His own conscience at this moment was his accuser; and he would fain have had the power to ward off that death which his own tyrannical temper had so largely contributed to bring upon the sufferer.

On entering the chamber he seemed struck dumb by the realization of the event to which he had but a minute before refused belief. It was indeed apparent that Mrs. Fountaine approached her end. Death was in every line of her expressive countenance. She was pale and sinking; she drew her breath with difficulty; whilst, with many pauses, she could only speak in broken sentences the few last wishes of her

heart—they were for her children. These, though so young, were now, by her own desire, gathered round her bed; the youngest, the little Elizabeth, was upon it, and she feebly endeavoured to strain the child to her bosom. Overcome by the effort, she sank back, and fixed her eyes with a peculiar earnestness on the face of Mr. Fountaine, as he drew near, pushed aside the nurse and a weeping attendant who had brought in the children, and, coming up to the bedside, exclaimed—"Why, Alice, what is this? I never thought you were so bad as to come to this. But I cannot bear to lose you. By Heaven, I will not lose you! I never thought of such a thing. I cannot bear to think of it now."

He seized her wan and feeble hand within his, grasped it, and, falling on the bed, made it shake again with the tempest of that sorrow which now burst through all his efforts to suppress it, and showed a strength of affection for his dying wife that not one present, who knew how arbitrarily he had been accustomed to treat her, ever gave him the credit for being capable of feeling for her. But Mr. Fountaine was an uncommon man: one of those characters whose passions, be they of a good or a bad nature, lie deep, and may never even be suspected to exist by the mere ordinary observer, till some circumstance of adequate power calls them forth; when they arise, like the blast of the whirlwind, with a force that sweeps down all before them.

Unrestrained by the presence of his dying wife, he gave way to paroxysm after paroxysm of feeling, turning a deaf ear to all the earnest entreaties of Hannah, that for God's sake—for her dear lady's sake—he would try and be more composed. At length he raised himself from the bed, and exclaiming, "I will, I will—say no more to me, I will be calm," turned to Mrs. Fountaine, threw himself on his knees, once more took her hand, and said, "O, Alice, forgive me! God's anger will strike unless you do forgive me! for there have been times—I feel it now—there have been times when I have been cruel to you. Forgive me, or I am a dead man—and on this spot!"

"Forgive you! O, my husband, you need not ask it! May God forgive me as truly as I do you!"

"Bless you! O bless you, Alice, for saying so! What can I do for you? Now that it is too late, I would give all I have on earth to save you, and never cross you more. But you will not die; you will not—you cannot have the heart to

die and leave me, and these children. They are more worthy of you than I am. Live, for their sake, if not for mine, live!"

"Life and death are with God alone," said Mrs. Fountaine. "He who gave me life calls me hence, and I must go." She paused, and then spoke again. "But I leave these with you. O, when I am gone, be an affectionate father to these poor little ones. Will you not love them, care for them, educate them? teach them to fear God—to love him as their Heavenly Father? O! you do not answer me!"

He put his hands before his face, and seemed to shrink and turn away. At length he turned towards her, and more by his looks and the pressing of her hand, which he still held within his, than by his words, seemed to give her the assurance she required of him.

She intimated a wish again to kiss her children, but, though still supported on the pillows, was now so feeble, that the little ones rose on the bed to embrace her, as she was unable to make the effort to clasp them. Hannah, thinking the last moments of a death-bed too full of terror for children of so tender an age to witness, motioned to their maid to lead them out of the room as soon as they retired from the bed. Only one remained—Elizabeth, an infant of but five years old.

Mrs. Fountaine looked earnestly at her husband—"How I have loved this little one!" she said. "She is like you!"

"And could you—could you love her for that?" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine. "I did not think it was so. What a wretch have I been!—but, oh, what a wretch must I be now!"

"Forbear this self-reproach," said Mrs. Fountaine; "it distresses me. Be happy, and may God bless you! Hannah."

My mother approached; the sufferer seemed fainting. She took the faithful housekeeper by the hand, looked at her, at the child, at Mr. Fountaine, and then said, "Let Hannah be to this——"; she stopped, unable to finish the sentence. She made another effort, but no voice came. Earnestly, and with an expression of anxiety that was almost painful, did she now fix her eyes on her husband.

"I know what you would wish," he said; "that Hannah should have the care of the children. It shall be so."

A faint smile for a moment irradiated the calm and still beautiful countenance of Mrs. Fountaine, but it soon passed away, and that indefinable change which speaks the close of

mortality came over the whole face, and showed that the cloud of death had overshadowed it; yet the dying mother made one effort more. Hannah saw what was its object. She snatched up the child that had been taken off the bed, and held her to her mother's bosom.

Mrs. Fountaine looked up. "Yes," said Hannah, "I understand you;" and turning to Mr. Fountaine she put the child into his arms; "she commits her to your especial care! O, take her to your bosom, and be to her indeed a father."

A mother's love, strong as death, had hitherto struggled even with death itself; but now, comforted and reassured in that dearest point, there was nothing left for her to do in life, and in a few minutes she parted from it without a sigh.

Mr. Fountaine, who held the child which Hannah had placed in his arms, stood for some minutes absolutely stupified. Hannah was the first to recal him to the actual state of things by gently endeavouring to relieve him of the child, with the intent to remove her from the chamber. But, the moment the bereaved husband gave sufficient attention to understand her purpose, he repulsed her in a manner that rendered all further interference vain, threw himself into a chair by the bedside, strained the infant to his bosom, and, bursting into a flood of tears, gave himself up without control to a second paroxysm of grief, so violent that it alarmed the child, who broke the solemnity which best befits such a scene with screams of fear; being, at so tender an age, alike incapable of comprehending the cause of the altered and motionless appearance of her mother, and of the frantic agony of her father.

"O, sir," said Hannah, "endeavour to be composed! Let me take the child from you; let me take her from this room. It is not a fit place for her now; let me take her."

"Never!" said Mr. Fountaine, "never! I'll never part from her more. Did not *she* give her to me?" He pointed to the dead body of his wife, and looked as if again struck with sudden horror at the sight of her he loved, who was now thus insensible to his distress. He placed the child by the side of the corpse, threw himself on the bed, and seemed to have lost all self-control in these moments of bitter sorrow.

Hannah begged, soothed, remonstrated, till, seeing how vain were all her efforts, she snatched Elizabeth off the bed, and, still holding her in her arms, hurried out of the room.

Mr. Fountaine, whose passionate grief gave its own strength

to any other feeling that might be called forth at the moment, felt greatly incensed at Hannah's thus taking the child from him, and, after impressing a kiss on the lifeless lips of his lamented wife, he followed Hannah in quest of his daughter. Once more did he feed his griefs and indulge the bitterness of his affliction by bestowing on the child those hearty but rude caresses which demonstrated the strong feelings of affection so characteristic of the man, and protested that to the last day of his life he would do all that her mother desired should be done for her, or he wished he might never see her more if he failed.

Now that he had quitted the chamber of death Hannah did not again attempt to take from him the child; and, by giving way to him in this, she obtained his consent to do all that was necessary on so sad an occasion.

CHAPTER III.

Behold,
Although the print be little, the whole matter
And copy of the father: eye, nose, lip,
The trick of his frown, his forehead; nay, the valley,
The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,
The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger.
SHAKSPERE.

Children blessings seem, but torments are,
When young our folly, and when old our fear.
OTWAY.

FROM the hour Hannah had committed the child to his arms, as Mr. Fountaine stood by the bedside of his dying wife, Elizabeth became her father's favourite. It was for Elizabeth, on his occasional journeys to Exeter, he ever brought home some pretty toy or ornament for her dress. For Elizabeth he bred a fine Newfoundland dog, as a sort of rough guardian for her, like himself. And (as soon as she could possibly be trusted on it) it was for Elizabeth he broke in and trained the most beautiful bay pony, with its silky flowing mane and its long tail, ever seen in the neighbourhood; and on its back he delighted to mount his darling child, who, in person, temper, and character, was so like himself.

On Elizabeth he doated, she was his openly avowed favourite. Yet this preference was principally indulged with a view to the gratification of his own feelings, for in all things else in respect to her and her sisters, Martha and Amy, he felt it must not be that the younger should be served before the elder of his house.

Deep as had been the impression made on Mr. Fountaine by his wife's death, it too soon wore away. All the originally good and strong feelings of his nature had been called up, but they did not produce any lasting effects. It was now, my mother used to say, he especially suffered from the want of a proper education. He had no pursuits worthy of himse f in which to employ the long and tedious days in the life of a country gentleman. He had no desirable society. He had for too many years ruled with arbitrary sway among an inferior sort of company—inferior, at least, in mind and manners—to seek better now, or even to relish it when it came in his way. For, like most men of station who give themselves up to comparatively low company, he felt awkward and even abashed in a higher circle. That want of ready complaisance also which he could not exact from his better bred equals, he was too apt to fancy into a want of due respect to himself, and hence arose so many bickerings and discontents that at last a morbid feeling about others ate itself into his very heart, and he looked on his most independent neighbours as enemies, in the midst of whose country it was his lot to live.

This unhappy estrangement from the best of the neighbouring gentry had, in process of time, as may well be supposed, a very injurious effect on Mr. Fountaine's daughters. The few ladies who had been intimate with their mother found little temptation to continue their friendship at a house where there was no one but such a man as Mr. Fountaine to give them reception. They gradually, therefore, dropped his acquaintance, or at least their visits, and the girls from their very childhood became accustomed to no better society than the fox-hunting, punch-drinking squires I have already described. Some gentleman farmer, however, of more than ordinary note was occasionally introduced to them; for, although Mr. Fountaine took no active part in farming himself, yet, by means of a favourite hind or bailiff, he assumed the character of a patron of agriculture, and had more than one valuable farm of his own that he kept in hand.

By degrees, and in no very long time, Mr. Fountaine shook off his sorrow. Yet, though his feelings were strong as ever on the subject of a son, he never married again. But in all things he was a man of contradictions. His natural dispositions were perpetually at war with his acquired habits. At different periods of his life he had shown a strong sense of his errors, and a wish to become a better man; and, though neither wanting in courage nor energy of character, and equal to any sudden effort, however great or painful, yet he wanted patience to render it effectual; he was incapable of the discipline necessary for a sustained exertion. Hence could he never accomplish the task of reforming himself. Whenever his own reflections pressed too importunately upon him, he shook them off as intruders, and once more returned to his old habits. Hence it was that his remorse for his unkindness to Mrs. Fountaine, which, combined with his sorrow for her death, had called up such a tempest of grief within his soul, so soon passed away, and was in a little while as if it had never been.

My mother never for a moment forgot her promise to her deceased mistress, and during the first year or two, except when Elizabeth was in the parlour with the Squire, the children were constantly under her care. But it was not always to be thus with them, for in less than three years after his wife's death Mr. Fountaine formed a very strange resolution, which he failed not to communicate to my mother, who (even as his wife had predicted) was entirely in his confidence, much respected by him, and, all things considered, had as much influence over him as she could reasonably expect, for on this head her expectations had never been so sanguine as those of poor Mrs. Fountaine.

One evening the Squire was sitting in the oak parlour, with only his two favourite dogs, when he sent for my mother. Little Miss Elizabeth was playing in a corner of the room with a new baby-house, which, on the previous day, he had brought her from Exeter, where he had been at the quarter sessions on his duties as a magistrate.

"Hannah," he said, as my mother entered the room, "shut the door and come and sit down by me; I want to talk with you." She obeyed.

"I want to talk with you about the education of my daughters."

Exceedingly delighted at hearing this, and at the very

kind manner in which the Squire seemed prepared to enter on the subject, my mother told him it was the one nearest to her own heart, as her dear lady had expressed so much anxiety about it, and had given her some instructions as to the course she wished to be pursued.

"Ay, very well; I dare say those instructions were all very good," said the Squire, in not quite so encouraging a tone as my mother could have wished. "But my poor wife could not know the plan I have in view for the children. Hannah, you know well how earnestly I have desired to have a son. An estate like mine, and I the only surviving man of my family, ought to have an heir. Three petticoats, Hannah, you know, cannot make one coat; but yet I do not complain; for that child in the corner there is very precious to me; I'd not lose her for a dozen boys; yet I ought to have an heir, and an heir I am determined to have, who shall be a Fountaine."

Hannah was about to speak; but he interrupted her.

"Not a word, Hannah," he said; "I know what you would advise me—to marry again; but I will not; on that head my mind is made up—I shall never get a woman like that again," added he, looking up at the portrait of his wife, which, at that time, hung over the chimney in the oak parlour; "she never thwarted me, Hannah; she was all gentleness, all goodness, though I was not at all times the kindest to her. But I will not put another in her place; no, I'll not put that affront upon her memory. I may desire you, as I do now, to fill that chair that was my wife's, and I may put you, as I have done, over my house and household, as mistress of both; but that is my pleasure, Hannah, and not your right, and I could turn you out again whenever I pleased. But I could not do so with a new Mrs. Fountaine, and I will have no woman claim any authority in my house, or over me, by right. The only woman who ever deserved to have any authority under this roof laid aside all claim to it for my sake. I believe it is better for myself I should not marry again, for I know I should be constantly comparing the second wife with the first, and I should tell her I did not like her or her ways half so well, and that would make the house too hot for us; so no more of marrying for me. And now hear my plan."

My mother assured him she was all attention.

"You know Scripture, Hannah," he continued. "You and

your mistress dearly loved Scripture. It says, 'Thou shalt not prefer the younger before the elder born,' and Martha is my eldest born, Hannah; I intend her to be my boy. I intend her, at my death, to have the old mansion-house, all my estate in land, and whatever else a son and heir would inherit, well tied up in entail, and whoever marries Martha shall take the name of Fountaine, or forfeit every penny I bequeath to her. I'll warrant me that no man who takes the girl will quarrel with the name; it will not be a dry fountain that thus comes to him, Hannah."

"And the dear young ladies, Miss Amy and Miss Elizabeth?" said my mother.

"They shall be well provided for," said Mr. Fountaine. "Ten thousand pounds each will be fortune enough for them, if they marry to my liking; or, if they die single, so much the better; it will in that case all go back to my boy, Martha —not that I love her the best—far from it; but I intend to do justice to her as the heir male, by creation, of the Fountaine family."

Hannah, of course, could do nothing but acquiesce. Once more she ventured to express a hope that the education of the young ladies would be such as to enable them to sustain with propriety and dignity, as their mother had done before them, so very considerable a fortune.

"I have not overlooked that point," said Mr. Fountaine. "Martha, who is to be my boy, must be somewhat trained as a boy. I must have something more than the mere woman in her. She shall learn to be a good accountant; to look well after the steward's books; and give an eye to the farms I keep in hand, and see how the cattle are managed, and receive the rents; and be as a master should be in his own family, who is a country gentleman of substance; and she shall hunt with me, and head my table, and receive my friends."

"Miss Martha has a great spirit, sir, already," said Hannah, "and I fear, unless you give her an education more suited to a woman, that she will become too bold, and get above your management."

"No, no," said Mr. Fountaine, "never fear that. I know how to break a frisky girl's spirit, as easily as a young colt's. No fear of Martha's not obeying me."

"And the other young ladies, Miss Amy and Miss Elizabeth; surely, sir, you will send them to school? Mrs.

Lillywhite, the clergyman's widow, who has opened a school at Totnes, would be an excellent mistress for them; she bears the character of being so good, religious, and conscientious; and it was solid worth Mrs. Fountaine chiefly desired to find in the instructress of her children. You could not do better than send them to Mrs. Lillywhite."

"Well, well, I will think about it, some day or other, perhaps," said Mr. Fountaine. "At present, Hannah, you can teach them, or they can teach themselves under your direction, all I desire them to know; and old Pitchpipe,—what do ye call the man, who comes into the neighbourhood here, every week, teaching music,—he may give them lessons on the harpsichord, and they can go to the school where young gentlemen and ladies are taught to dance, when I take them for a few weeks to Exeter in the autumn; they may learn there of the Frenchman, who teaches all the young folk how to cut their capers, and how to palaver in the French tongue."

Such was Mr. Fountaine's plan of education for his daughters. In vain did my mother endeavour to prevail with him to change it, and point out to him that at a good school the young people, from an early age, would have companions, and form intimacies suited to their rank and fortune.

"Don't talk nonsense to me, Hannah," said the Squire; "you are governess enough for my daughters. And as to company—have they not little Johnny Samford and his mother, whenever they like it? and Martha is fond enough of them, I'm sure."

Hannah tried to convince Mr. Fountaine that neither Johnny Samford nor his mother, though very excellent people, were exactly what she meant by the society into which she had intimated it would be desirable early to introduce his daughters; so that the manners of young ladies, and the habits of good breeding, might be taught them. Mr. Fountaine, however, persisted in his plans and his opinions; and, as the Widow Samford and her son will play no inconsiderable part in my story, I must here pause to say a few words about them.

Mr. Fountaine, though tyrannical, was not an ill-natured man: his tyranny, in reference to others, was solely exercised where the will or the wishes of an individual, over whom he had power, interfered with his own; in such cases, right or wrong, he was arbitrary. But where none of these

personal feelings interfered, he could both feel for others, and see where injustice was inflicted or suffered, with great impartiality; and on more occasions than one had stepped forward to give aid to the oppressed against the oppressor, in a manner that was truly praiseworthy. An act of this sort had for ever bound to him the Widow Samford.

Her husband had been the younger son of one of the oldest and best descended families in the West of England; old enough for Mr. Fountaine to avow that some of his ancestors had intermarried with theirs. He had wedded for love, and in secret, a young woman of great beauty but inferior station. On its becoming known, this act of imprudence so offended his father that old Samford, when his son attempted to take home his bride, shut the door in his face, and refused to see him. As the young man had been intended for the Church, but had not taken holy orders, he was of no calling. Thus then was he at once cast out to utter destitution.

Fortunately for him, his bride had been an intimate friend and schoolfellow of Mrs. Fountaine. To that amiable lady, therefore, she at once applied for aid and counsel in her distress; and, in consequence of his wife's earnest solicitation, Mr. Fountaine interfered, and talked to old Samford. Yet, though he somewhat relented, he would do nothing more than bestow on his disobedient son a small farm, and a very small sum to stock it. And thus the scholar and the gentleman, pressed by poverty and by his father's anger, was compelled to renounce the Church, for which he had been educated, and to begin life as a farmer, sorely against his will.

In less than twelve months his wife brought him a son; and, although this little one added another motive to his industry, Mr. Samford never could reconcile his feelings to the hard lot which, by his own imprudence, he had certainly brought upon himself. His health became affected by his perpetual dissatisfaction; and on hearing that his father had died, leaving all his immense wealth to his eldest brother, and had cut him off with one hundred pounds, branding him, even in his will, for his disobedience, it fairly broke his heart. He was carried to his grave before this legacy of a father's wrath could be paid to him. The eldest son, who either felt or affected to feel equally indignant at his brother's marriage, being neither prompted by pity nor affection, made

no advances towards his widowed sister-in-law, or her fatherless boy; although that boy was his own nephew, and, as he was himself an unmarried man, presumptive heir to his great estate. All he did was to intimate to the widow, through his steward or man of business, that he was ready to pay the legacy on demand.

Here again Mr. Fountaine interposed with good effect for the widow. He so far conquered his pride as to do an act he deemed beneath the consideration he owed to himself; for he waited on the brother-in-law, and with his rough but strong power of eloquence so well pleaded the cause of the widow, that he shamed his rich adversary into the promise of doing something equivalent to the value of one hundred pounds, in addition to the legacy; for he still obstinately maintained that any further countenance of a woman, or her offspring, through whose marriage into the family he declared his father had been hastened to the grave, and his brother had died broken-hearted, would be a violation of all natural respect to the memory of the dead. Thus did Avarice and Meanness cover their hardheartedness with an affectation of piety and justice.

Mr. Fountaine never wasted a word of remark on sophistry such as this. But he represented to the miser that the best service he could render his sister-in-law would be to send her some man, from one of his own large farms, who was trustworthy, and capable of superintending and making the most of the widow's little property. Accordingly, Mr. Samford consented to part from what he valued less than the additional hundred pounds—namely, an elderly man who understood farming, and who soon proved himself to be far more efficient than the late master of the land had been in its cultivation; and very differently did the small farm thrive under his management to what it had done under that of the deceased poor scholar.

The widow Samford and her little boy got on very well; and, as she lived not more than a mile from Fountaine Hall, she and her child were frequent guests at that hospitable mansion. By the advice of Mr. Fountaine, her little boy was to be brought up to farm the small estate which at her death would one day be his own. This lad was born in the same month and year as Mr. Fountaine's eldest daughter Martha; both had been christened at the same time; and Mr. and Mrs. Fountaine had stood sponsors for the infant boy not many

weeks before its unhappy father died. All these circumstances, and the regard felt by Mrs. Fountaine for the widow, had caused a great intimacy to subsist between the two families, which did not end with the life of Mrs. Fountaine; on the contrary, it rather increased.

Mr. Fountaine, by having made himself so busy in Mrs. Samford's affairs, and rendered so much service to her and her fatherless child, experienced such pleasant feelings in his own bosom whenever he saw her, that almost unconsciously he became warmly attached to the person of whom he could never think without self-satisfaction. For although Mrs. Samford was a woman of most simple education, very homely manners, knew nothing of the world, and never approached Mr. Fountaine but with the deferential respect of an inferior towards a superior, yet her conversation always made the Squire more pleased with himself for the share he had in her well-being; and that is a charm which never fails in its effect upon the human mind, more especially when, as in Mr. Fountaine, the mind of the individual is a proud one.

CHAPTER IV.

> These two, a maiden and a youth, were there,
> Gazing—the one on all that was beneath,
> Fair as herself—but the boy gazed on her;
> And both were young, and one was beautiful.
>
> BYRON'S *Dream.*

I HAVE said that Martha and the little fatherless boy were of the same age, and that Mr. Fountaine was his godfather. The children were almost constantly together, and shared in common all their childish pastimes and pursuits. I more especially remember to have heard my mother speak of the last twelfth-night that was kept at the Hall, the Christmas before Mrs. Fountaine died. That night, when the young people drew for king and queen, the lots fell to young Samford and Martha, who were declared the rightful sovereigns of the evening and its sports.

From that evening the children seemed in a more especial manner to consider themselves as belonging to each other, and "my king" and "my queen" were the names they fre-

quently exchanged, whilst whatever playthings or little property they possessed were in common.

Nothing could exceed the love and affection these two fair-haired children entertained for each other. They never quarrelled but about one thing—and that was, Martha's wish that he should be a sailor, and would one day take her out in a ship of his own to show her the wide sea, and the lands that lay on the other side of it. But to this repeated wish of Martha that he would be a man, and run away to sea, Johnny always objected on account of his mother. What could she do without him? and she wished him to be a farmer, though he owned he did not like it. He confessed to Martha that often, when, in order to teach him something about farming, he was sent out to look after the cattle, or the labourers in the field, he would take with him a book from those which had belonged to his poor father, and would dwell on that rather than his toil. The old hind who managed for his mother often told him that he would be a never-do-well kind of a farmer; and, for all he could see, his love of a book would make him good for nothing.

When Martha and Johnny gained the age of about fifteen years their intimacy continued, but it began to change in its character, for Johnny would fight other boys if they offended Martha. And Martha would blush and colour deeply as she talked about Johnny; and look angry, and speak pettishly, if any one called him negligent or stupid about farming, though he was certainly both; and she always said he was the handsomest lad and the best dancer that came to the Hall, and the most kind and good-natured boy that ever lived.

Thus much do I know of this youthful intimacy; but the next period in the history of young Samford I cannot so closely trace. I know it more in the result than in its details. All I can state is, that I heard my mother say there was something in it which, at the time, appeared to the neighbours very mysterious and incomprehensible.

Young Samford had attained his sixteenth year, and was still no way improved as a farmer, though very much as a self-educated lad. He had an active and resolute spirit, as well as an ardent thirst for the acquisition of knowledge. About the period of which I speak, he was known to have many long and anxious consultations with his mother; she owned as much to one or two of her friends. All at once

Johnny Samford disappeared; and his mother neither confessed that she knew where he was gone nor made any outcry about him. No one but Mr. Fountaine seemed to have any acquaintance with the truth, for to him, in a very short time, the widow communicated the fact that her son was gone abroad; a friend of his late father had promised to show him favour; and she hoped, with God's blessing, he would do well.

Martha, though she missed much her young companion, yet, like his mother, made no complaint; and never told even Hannah, whom she so much loved, whether he had taken any formal leave of her or not before going; but only said, "He will come back some day, I dare say." Fond, however, as she had been of him, Martha grew reserved on the subject of her young companion; and henceforth made no inquiry about him, or, at least, none openly, when she saw his mother with other persons at the Hall.

Time rolled on, and not much improvement took place in the education of the young ladies. Martha became an adept in all those masculine pursuits and occupations which Mr. Fountaine had so early designed for her. Miss Amy, who was as self-willed and as high-spirited as Miss Martha, but had not her good sense or steadiness of feeling, grew very wild and giddy; and, having no one placed over her to keep her in anything like discipline at an early age, she soon set my mother at defiance, and altogether got above her management. For whenever she would endeavour to advise her, or to interfere with her wishes, she would scorn her, and laugh in her face; telling her, that, if papa had wanted to rule her, he should have given her a better governess than the housekeeper, who had a right to order the servants but not Mr. Fountaine's daughters. And then away would Miss Amy go, and hoyden and romp with the young men of all sorts, some much beneath her; for, as she grew up, Miss Amy was quite a rustic coquette, and liked first one young man and then another, and did not know where to fix; and yet seemed eager to catch at any one who would dance, and talk, and be more familiar with her than it became one of her birth and fortune to admit. But the poor creature had neither education nor control, and sad was the end of all this for the unhappy Amy, as will too soon appear.

Elizabeth Fountaine was the most favoured and the most fortunate of all the daughters in respect to education; yet

even hers was not such as it should have been, or as her mother would have desired for her. I have said she was her father's darling; and seeing how handsome she grew, how quick were her parts, and what a fine ear and voice she had for music, he determined to give her two or three years at a boarding-school, first-rate in point of terms and fashion. But at this school, quite contrary to the views her anxious mother had expressed on the subject, accomplishments and not discipline of the mind, not solid improvement, were made the first objects of instruction.

There, the beautiful, the clever, the favourite daughter (who was already called "a great fortune") of the rich Mr. Fountaine was flattered, and praised, and set above her more humble companions, both by mistress, teachers, and masters; all having an eye to their own interest in thus contributing to the ruin of an already spoiled child.

At the age of seventeen, Elizabeth returned home highly accomplished in all the arts and learning of the most fashionable school in the West of England; and as vain as an overestimate of her own beauty and talents could possibly make her; quite as self-willed as either of her sisters, and as proud as Mr. Fountaine himself, to whom she bore no less a resemblance in feature than in all the marked characteristics, and those not the most worthy, that had ever distinguished him.

Yet, with all these follies, she retained that native sweetness of disposition which gave an indescribable charm to her manners, and absolutely fascinated all who came near her. None but those who lived under the same roof with her, and saw her in the daily intercourse of her own family, would, at this early period, have suspected the existence of faults such as she possessed, and those so deeply rooted in her character.

The young ladies had now arrived at the age of womanhood, Martha being twenty-four years old; Amy twenty-two, and Elizabeth seventeen. I have already said enough to show they had not the advantage of any desirable society of their own sex. The habits and manners of Mr. Fountaine, and the way in which he let his daughters run about and romp with the boys, had in fact kept aloof all the respectable ladies of the neighbourhood.

None but inferior persons (except Mrs. Samford) of the female sex ever visited at the house, and that but seldom;

whilst of wild, sporting young men and fox-hunting squires there was no lack; and Miss Martha had now for some years headed her father's table.

This almost exclusive society of the male sex had its usual effects. From the bolder subjects of their conversation, and the stronger mind of man, the girls learned to be above the frivolities of their sex. But, whilst their tone of mind became firmer, they gained with it more confidence than is desirable in the manners of women in early youth; whilst timidity and that retiring modesty which draws love after it as it retreats was lost; and the Misses Fountaine soon became, what most women become who are almost exclusively accustomed to the society of the other sex, unsuitable companions for their own, which they were either prone to hold in contempt or entirely to disrelish. These remarks, however, do not so much apply to Elizabeth Fountaine as to her sisters; for she had formed some female friendships at the boarding-school that will be noticed in due place.

CHAPTER V.

Baptista. Now,
Signor Petruchio; how speed you with my daughter?
Pet. How but well, sir? how but well?
It were impossible I should speed amiss.
Bap. Why, how now, daughter Kate; in your dumps?
Katherine. Call you me daughter? Now, I promise you,
You have showed a tender, fatherly regard,
To have me wed to one half lunatic,
A madcap ruffian, and a swearing jack.

SHAKSPERE.

IT was on a summer's evening, soon after Miss Elizabeth had returned from her last half-year's schooling, that Squire Fountaine sat smoking a pipe, with the punch-bowl before him, in the oak parlour, which looked out on the lawn, and Miss Martha was playing with a favourite puppy in the window-seat.

All at once Mr. Fountaine said, "Martha, my boy" (for so was he apt to call her, more especially when he was in a good humour, or had anything pleasant to propose to her)—"Martha, my boy, I have taught you many a good thing—and you have learned freely and well, I will say that of you,

and have never been squeamish and cowardly like some foolish women; you can sit a horse or leap a gate as well as any young woman in the county—better. And for looking after my farm, and the rearing of poultry, and seeing that the servants make the most of them at market, I don't know your fellow. Yet one thing, Martha, you can't do to oblige me—you can't smoke with me, or help me on with my punch, and so I am often left to what I never could relish—my pipe and my bowl without a boon companion. But I've thought of a way of mending the matter, and doing us both a service—finding a husband for you, and a companion for me, all under one, Martha. What say you to that?"

Martha, who had never before received the least hint from her father on the subject, looked up as if doubtful whether he were in earnest or in jest; and she did not look best pleased, saying only, "Sir!" in reply to his proposal.

Mr. Fountaine, who expected nothing but the most ready acquiescence, was by no means satisfied with the air or the tone in which this interjectional monosyllable was pronounced; and immediately a cloud of anger passed over his brow, and settled into a most ominous frown. Martha, taken by surprise, and having no desire to abide the bursting of the storm which the frown indicated, rose up, blushed—but more with anger than with any other feeling—and prepared to leave the room. Yet she paused, and said, in a better temper than her first emotion betrayed, "Sir, you cannot be in earnest; so very serious a thing, and so sudden——" and, immediately retreating towards the door, added some excuse for leaving him.

"Well, well," said Mr. Fountaine, "it's always the way with young maids to blush and say 'No' at the first mention of a husband. But as he is to take your name, and not you his, Martha, I did not expect such nonsense from you. But come hither, wench, and kiss your old father, and thank him for looking about for you."

Martha approached, yet not very well pleased, as she did not exactly know how to treat the proposal—whether at this moment she should laugh at it, or defy it outright. Mr. Fountaine took her hand with kindness, told her she was well-favoured and tall, but not so pretty as Elizabeth; then chucked her under the chin, and bade her look up, protesting that he knew how to choose a man for her who should

be both proper and tall. He then bade Martha go; but, no sooner had she gained the door of the apartment, than he hallooed after her—"Martha, my girl, you may as well know who it is—Slashing Dick is the man I intend for your husband."

The moment Martha left the oak parlour she flew to the housekeeper's apartment (for on all occasions the girls—even Amy—would come to Hannah in their troubles), unable to conceal the state of fear and agitation into which she had been thrown by her father's proposal. She threw herself into the great chair that stood by the side of the old chimney, and, heedless of the presence of Hannah's husband, exclaimed, "Oh, Hannah! what shall I do? How shall I tell you what my father has been saying to me? Advise me what to do, or I shall go distracted!"

Hannah was surprised; but, before she could speak, Thomas exclaimed—"I warrant me, master has been promising Miss Martha a husband who is not to her mind; I am afraid it is Slashing Dick."

"It cannot be," said Hannah; "he is old enough to be Miss Martha's father."

"It is indeed that horrid man!" cried the unhappy Martha; "but I will die rather than have him; I will at once go back to the parlour, and so I will tell my father to his face." And up jumped the high-spirited girl, and would have kept her word.

Hannah interposed, "O, do not, do not, dear Miss Martha, do not so anger your father by contradiction; all may yet be well."

"Not with me, Hannah, I assure you," said Martha; "unless I could hope my father did but jest, and did not really mean to make me wretched."

"And yet," said the kind-hearted house-steward thoughtfully, "I fear it is so. There is no single gentleman comes here so often as Squire Dickons. They call him Slashing Dick all the country round, because he is tall, strong, and muscular, and he glories in the strength of his arm."

"And of his skull too, Thomas," said Hannah; "for no man ever had so many broken heads as Squire Dickons. Indeed, it was one of these which master gave him (when they quarrelled, and he was brought to this house half dead) that ever after made them such good friends, because my master took such care of him till the wound was cured."

"Only half cured, Hannah?" said Thomas, "for Squire Dickons must be crack-brained still to think of Miss Martha."

"He think of her, indeed," said Hannah; "he, old enough to be her father; a widower himself, and with three children; I never heard of such folly! Surely, Mr. Fountaine cannot think seriously of such a match."

"I do not know," said Thomas. "Squire Dickons has one of the largest landed estates in the West. He can carry a borough when he chooses, and he can count many generations of gentility; and you know that Squire Fountaine thinks even more of good blood than of broad lands; and that has something to do with it, or I am much mistaken."

Martha again vehemently protested that she would never have him, and it was with great difficulty Hannah prevailed with her not to irritate her father by an open opposition at once, but to await a more favourable opportunity for remonstrance; and this was the beginning of a long course of domestic disquietude and trouble, which soon grew from bad to worse. I pass in silence the angry struggles, the quarrels, the bitterness, the undutiful demeanour on the one hand, and the obstinacy and tyranny on the other, which subsisted between father and daughter, when both were determined and neither would yield.

At length these contests grew to such a height, that Mr. Fountaine declared his daughter should be married whether she liked it or not; ordered the settlements to be drawn, and the wedding clothes to be made, and bade Squire Dickons come and take a bowl of punch with him the next afternoon, and he would teach him how to go a-courting to his daughter.

After dinner Martha was ordered to attend her father in the oak parlour. On entering, to her extreme surprise, she found his friend with him.

Mr. Fountaine, without a pause, rose up, took her by the hand, and, leading her up to the Squire, said, "Sir, this young lady is my eldest daughter, the heir to my estate, for so have I made her; whoever takes her must take my name along with her. She has many faults and follies, but some good points in her, for all that; wants a little breaking, and has been too much indulged. She has had no love follies in her head for any man, and will make a good wife when she has had experience enough to know what is good for herself. I have done my duty by her, to the best of my judgment, as

a father; and I now give you the promise of her with this hand (putting Martha's into the Squire's), and I doubt not you will do your duty to her as a good husband; and, if you did not, I should know how to make you. But I fear not that. Martha, none of these airs, if you please; speak up, and receive this gentleman with civility. Mr. Dickons, have you nothing, sir, to say to a young lady who is thus given to you?"

"Say, sir?" replied Squire Dickons; "why, yes, sir, I have to say, sir, I am very much obliged to her—that is, sir, to you. And, upon my word, ma'am, I have not seen a finer woman than yourself since the last race-ball. Ma'am, permit me to salute you." He did so; the custom of the day rendered it but as a common compliment. "Indeed I shall love you very much, and make you a good husband. And I hear great things of you, ma'am; that you can look well to the household, and ride after the hounds, better than any young woman in the county. Upon my word, ma'am, you are just the woman for me, and I the man for you; and so there is no more to be done but to sign and seal, and I am ready for church any day you wish me."

Martha was taken so completely by surprise, that, what with fear and anger struggling in her bosom for the mastery, she knew not how to reply. She was, for the moment, absolutely dumb with astonishment. Yet she rallied, and prepared to burst on the unabashed Squire with an indignant answer, when her father fixed his stern eye upon her in a manner that made her shrink and tremble. A daughter may be disobedient; she may be pert and unruly; but there is something in the legitimate authority of a parent and a man, though arbitrary, when strongly enforced, that is almost irresistible with a child. Hence is it, that, although children sometimes deceive their parents, they seldom brave their determination with an open and resolved contradiction of their will.

So was it with Martha; her father had never before been thus calmly, severely determined. She could have argued with him, had he still argued with her, till both were wearied; but she could not resist his absolute commands; she could not stand firm in her purpose when an eye so stern was fixed upon her face. She was awed, overpowered; a choking sensation seized her; she felt she could no longer support herself in such a presence; and, snatching away her hand

from Squire Dickons, without uttering a word she retreated from the parlour, closed the door, and, running to the housekeeper's room, rushed up to my mother, threw herself upon her neck, and fell into so strong a fit of hysterics that it was some time before the alarmed Hannah could restore her to herself, or learn what had happened.

No sooner was sense and speech restored, than she threw herself at Hannah's feet, and would not be raised from that position (so humbling is deep heartfelt distress) till she had implored her as a friend to save her; to think of some way to save her from being sacrificed to a man she abhorred. "O, Hannah!" she said, "think what you can do for me; for my dear mother's sake!—do not give me up! For the sake of her who on her deathbed commended her children to your care, try to save the most unhappy of them all from a fate that will be worse than death!"

"Alas! my dear young lady," said Hannah, "what can I do? Yet I will speak to Mr. Fountaine, and will try to do my best. But do endeavour to take rest, or you will be in a fever, after such a fit as you have had. Go to bed—compose your spirits; pray to God for his blessing; and, whilst you seek your Heavenly Father, I will try to move your earthly parent to show some pity to his child."

Martha retired to bed, and cried herself to sleep. The Squire was gone when Hannah sought Mr. Fountaine; but, finding him in a very obdurate humour, she wisely withdrew, and resolved to watch the first opportunity that might be more favourable for her purpose. More than half the influence which Hannah had maintained over Mr. Fountaine arose from whatever exertion she made of it being always well timed. The following day was Sunday, when the incident occurred I am about to mention, as it is of import in my narrative.

Though, in respect to the young ladies, an attention to strict decorum was neglected, yet pride was not forgotten; so that on every Sabbath, when the family went to church to hear old Parson Nixon read and preach, it was always in the state and ceremony of those old-fashioned times. First rode the Squire with his eldest daughter, Miss Martha, by his side; each mounted on a superb horse, with saddles covered with crimson velvet and silver mountings. Next came Hannah, with Miss Amy on a pillion behind her; and (before she went to boarding-school) Miss Elizabeth used to follow

so mounted behind my father, Thomas; but now, on her return home, she insisted on having a horse to herself.

Sometimes, after church, Mr. Fountaine and the ladies would linger a little at the porch in the churchyard, to gossip with such of the neighbours as were their familiar friends, or with the farmers and their wives; and not unfrequently to give a kind word to the poor. For, though pride was the besetting sin of the Fountaines, yet it was principally shown towards their equals or their superiors. The poor had no cause to complain; for they were only too good to many who sometimes sadly abused their generosity and kindness.

Parson Nixon, who read in a voice so thick and indistinct that not one word in ten he spoke could be understood, had on this Sunday got through the service in his usual manner and tone, and was just mounting the pulpit-stairs for his twenty minutes' sermon (Mr. Fountaine, as Squire of the parish, forbidding him ever to exceed that time); the pitch-pipe was giving out the key to the psalmody of a village choir, when there was a sudden stir and bustle in the church; and the attention of the congregation was turned on two most indecorously late comers, who walked into the church, and seated themselves in the pew, on that day empty, next to Mr. Fountaine's.

Some raised their eyes, others peeped over the pews, all were curious to see who it could be that had thus disturbed everybody and arrived at the end of the prayers, to hear Parson Nixon get through a discourse, which when delivered by him, though short in reality, ever seemed long and wearisome. Only poor, drooping Martha did not raise her head from the prayer-book, whose leaves she was turning over, possibly with other thoughts than ought to have occupied her in that place; and Squire Fountaine took no notice of the late comers, for he was already nodding; half awake, half asleep; the weather being sultry, and the church warm and close.

The service for the day at length came to an end. All had risen from their knees, and Mr. Fountaine was waking up from his nap, as he usually did at the termination of Parson Nixon's discourse, when he observed Martha start, and a deep blush overspread her whole face, whilst there was an air of pleased confusion about her eyes that was very extraordinary. In another moment he observed similar marks of confusion in the face of a young and very handsome man, in the next pew,

who wore the uniform of a naval officer, and whose eyes were unquestionably fixed on Martha. By the side of this youth stood, with her head raised, and her countenance bright with smiles, the Widow Samford, who, by nodding, kissing her hand, and moving towards the pew-door, seemed to speak her impatience to introduce to Mr. Fountaine his godson, her own darling Johnny, now come home to her from sea (having been on service on a foreign coast) a first lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and for the present in the command of a ship.

No sooner did Martha recognise him, than, surprised by the excess of her joy into a momentary forgetfulness of all caution, she turned to her father, and (as the tide of recollection, connected with the days of her childhood, rushed upon her) exclaimed in a tone of exultation, "That is my king!" The expression caught the attention of the young officer; and, even though in the church, it was impossible he could do other than softly respond to it, "That is my queen," in a voice that her ear, quickened by her feelings, drank in with delight.

Not a word more was said, not a look more was interchanged, for by this time Martha saw Squire Dickons coming towards her to ask her how she did, and to tell her it was a fine day, and she was too much afraid of him and her father to give any more signs of recognition to the wearer of the blue coat with the gold lace.

Whether Mr. Fountaine thought there was nothing more than natural in his daughter's joy on thus meeting again the companion of her childhood, I do not know; but, whatever might have been his opinion, he was not a man to turn his back on his godson, or on an old friend, and when he got into the churchyard, and began to talk to the Captain (for so he would persist in calling Lieutenant Samford), he shook him heartily by the hand, and gave his mother joy on her gallant son's success, and concluded by asking them both home to dinner. As soon as the punch began to circulate, young Samford, who shunned the bowl as much as civility would let him do so, related "all the portance of his travel's history" to Mr. Fountaine, and told him by what friends and what steps he had become what he was; the several actions in which he had been engaged were not forgotten, nor the prizes he had been so fortunate as to make, nor the prize-money. His success in the last particular had determined him, he said, to take his mother out of her little farm, to let

it on lease, and to settle her in the town where she was born —Kingsbridge. And all this he did in a very few weeks after. The Widow Samford, proud alike of the courage, the handsome person, and the goodness of her son, was both thankful and happy; and thus settled in her new home I must for the present leave her.

CHAPTER VI.

It makes me mad,—day, night, late, early,
At home, abroad, alone, in company,
Waking or sleeping, still my care hath been
To have her matched: and having now provided
A gentleman of worthy parentage,
Of fair demesnes, hopeful and nobly train'd,
Stuffed (as they say) with honourable parts;
Proportioned as one's heart could wish a man,
And then to have a wretched, puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,
To answer—I'll not wed--I cannot love,
I am too young—I pray you pardon me;—
But, an you will not wed, I'll pardon you,
Graze where you will, you shall not house with me;
Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest,—
Thursday is near, lay hand on heart, advise;
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend,
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die i' the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee!

SHAKSPERE.

SOME little time after these events had occurred, Mr. Fountaine one day summoned Miss Martha to his presence, and told her he had long enough indulged her in her delays, and that she must make up her mind, for he had fixed the wedding-day for that day week. On hearing this Martha turned white as death, and was mute with surprise.

"Martha," cried Mr. Fountaine, "what is this? You look more like one who has received a sentence for execution than like a girl going to be made—what all girls long to be made —a wife."

Martha summoned up resolution enough to say—"Sir, I feel as if you had passed upon me a sentence of death, or worse than death; for if you marry me to that man—I cannot bear to name his hated name—I must be for ever miserable. You will destroy your child."

For a moment her father stood gazing on her with astonishment. But his silence was only like that preceding the thunder-storm; for again did the fury of Mr. Fountaine's anger rage, and again was Martha overawed. The father's voice in violent accents, and the deep sobs and exclamations of the daughter, made themselves audible even in the housekeeper's room, and so much alarmed Hannah that, shaking in every limb with fear, she hastened to the scene of contest. Her arrival was greeted by a share of the tempest falling on her own head, for Mr. Fountaine now bitterly reproached her with having spoiled Martha by her indulgence, and ended by commanding Hannah to see all prepared against that day week for his daughter's marriage.

"O, sir! not in a week," exclaimed his daughter. "A criminal who is to die has longer time than that allowed for preparation. O, my father! if I must be sacrificed give me, give me a little space to prepare my mind, if possible, for submission; for my mother's sake, hear me; I am her child; think, were she living, that she would now plead to you for me, and do not deny me so poor a request—so short a respite."

Mr. Fountaine wavered, for even in his most stormy mood he never heard his deceased wife named with absolute indifference, though it failed in moving him to give up any purpose on which he had determined.

"O, sir!" said Hannah, seeing that he wavered, "do not say in a week! do not; and besides," she continued, resuming, though respectfully, a little of the importance of the mistress of the household, a character that had been assigned her by Mr. Fountaine himself, "you have ordered me to have everything prepared for this marriage in a manner worthy your eldest daughter's union with one to whom you will give your name and the heirship of your estate. I will strictly obey all your commands, but I must have due time allowed me for their fulfilment; I am neither young nor strong, and it is impossible I can have all prepared so soon."

The manner with which Hannah contrived to blend respect towards himself with great firmness in maintaining the reasonable points of her own argument at last, as in all former contests, prevailed; and Mr. Fountaine now yielded to the housekeeper's wishes what neither his daughter's tears nor the mention of her late mother could effect.

"Well, Hannah," he replied, "if I kill you with fagging

day and night to get all things ready for this foolish girl's wedding I shall never meet with your like again. You shall have what you ask for. Name your own time. How much do you want?"

"A month, sir, at the least."

"A month!" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine; "that's more than I intended. But I will not go from my word. Well, then, this day month shall be the time; let me have all ready on your part, Hannah, and I will take care that what the lawyers and the parson have to do is not behindhand."

Martha now rose and approached her father, but, perceiving her intent, he broke away from her, and left her on the floor, with Hannah to comfort her as well as she could.

From the hour of this last interview Martha gave over all thoughts of moving her obdurate father to anything like a relenting mood. She permitted all the fine clothes and jewels he had ordered to be brought to her, but only said, over and over again, as she looked on them, "Hannah, I shall never wear them." But if questioned further she would give no answer whatever, which, together with her deeply dejected air, so alarmed Hannah that she began to fear Miss Martha had some rash thoughts in her head, and would make away with herself before the day arrived. Mr. Fountaine, however, though she told him her fears, remained deaf to all persuasion, and said it was only a trick of Martha to alarm him; but old birds were not to be caught by chaff, and it should not frighten him.

Hannah then conjured the youthful Elizabeth, who was tender-hearted, to watch her sister, and try to comfort her. But it was all in vain; Martha only answered her attempts at consolation with sighs and tears: and as to the lover, Squire Dickons, he knew well enough Miss Fountaine did not fancy him, but he was repeatedly assured by the old gentleman she would do so one of these days; and so he left to her father the office of courting her, and only paid a few formal visits when the family were present and nothing particular could be said. It is but justice to Squire Dickons to say, that, although a blunt, fox-hunting, single-stick playing gentleman, who did not much understand the feelings or manners of young ladies, he was of a kind heart and an affectionate disposition; so that, could he have known the truth, he would not have desired Miss Martha should be made miserable on his account. But Squire Fountaine, who looked

on his daughter's refusal as the effect of whim alone, kept him completely in the dark.

On the fifth morning of the last week previous to the intended marriage Mr. Fountaine took his seat at the breakfast-table with Amy and Elizabeth. He had always been particular that his eldest daughter should head his table, make the tea, and do all those offices that had formerly belonged to her poor mother, in the parlour. Martha did not appear as usual.

"She is giving way to the sulks, I dare say," said Mr. Fountaine, "and is not yet risen."

"Indeed, sir, but she is," replied Miss Elizabeth. "She was up this morning the first in the house, for she woke me by rising almost as soon as it was day, and said she felt so feverish in bed, and her head ached so, she would lie no longer."

"Is this the fact?" said Mr. Fountaine.

"Yes, sir," answered Miss Elizabeth; "it is the fact; and I soon after saw her cross the lawn, and go towards her poultry-house."

"Well, then, I suppose," said Mr. Fountaine, "she will be back soon; but I shall not wait for her. Do you, Elizabeth, make the tea."

The breakfast proceeded, after he had directed that Miss Fountaine should be sought for, and ordered to return to the house without delay. Half-an-hour passed and she did not appear, but Hannah did. Her death-like looks spoke her errand.

Mr. Fountaine started up. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "what has happened?—my daughter!"

"Can nowhere be found," said Hannah. "And O, sir, I fear the worst! For some days past she has been in a state bordering on distraction. And O, sir, to think how often she said she should never wear those bridal clothes!"

Mr. Fountaine turned deadly pale: he seemed awe-struck. What his conscience might have whispered to him I know not; but he did not stay to talk; he hastily left the room, and soon showed what were his fears by hurrying down to the river, and sending out messengers and servants in all directions to gain intelligence. To describe the distress, the consternation that prevailed, would be impossible. Squire Dickons, whose unfortunate suit had occasioned so much misery, seemed shocked and agitated, and repeatedly ex-

pressed the hope that Miss Fountaine had not drowned or hanged herself to get away from him, as there was no occasion for it. For, if Mr. Fountaine had not urged him to persevere, he should long ago have withdrawn stakes; or, if she had only asked him not to have her, he would have complied, with all his heart, with her wishes.

My mother used to say, such were the pains taken that seven parishes were on that day searched, but all without effect. The disappearance of the young lady was no less extraordinary than mysterious. She had been seen by no one since Miss Amy saw her cross the lawn, towards the poultry-house; and neither alive nor dead was she found.

Active search continued; and the first week after she was missing was passed in misery: day succeeding night, and night day, in the most distressing expectation and suspense. At length Mr. Fountaine offered no less than five hundred pounds reward to any who could give him any clue whatever by which to trace her. But it produced no effect; not so much as a single offer of any information was laid before him. As he one day remarked to Hannah, in the bitterness of his soul, it seemed as if the earth had opened to swallow her up alive.

At the end of this terrible week of alarm and suspense, a thought all at once darted into my mother's mind, and she hastened to communicate it to Mr. Fountaine. "Sir," said she, "when you were lately at Kingsbridge did you call on Mrs. Samford?"

The Squire started from his seat; as if by some indescribable sympathy, the thought which so deeply weighed on the mind of Hannah had instantly flashed on him a painful conviction. He clenched his hand, and in the very agony of his feelings struck his forehead, as he exclaimed—"It must be so! fool that I was not to foresee this. He has her. But tell me, woman—for I will know—where did that villain Samford speak to her?—where meet her?—where did he take her from me?"

Hannah trembled at the sight of so much passion, and, dropping on her knees before her infuriated master, assured him, as she hoped to be saved hereafter, she knew not that Captain Samford had ever spoken to Miss Martha, or seen her, except on that day he came with his mother into the church, and surprised everybody by so suddenly returning among them.

Angry as Mr. Fountaine was, nevertheless he felt she spoke the truth. He instantly ordered four horses to be put to the old family coach, that was never used except on occasions of state or of great emergency; and, setting off as if life or death might be depending on the swiftness of his motions, he speedily found himself before the door of the Widow Samford at Kingsbridge.

But neither the surprise nor the disappointment of Mr. Fountaine could be expressed when Mrs. Samford, without showing any other signs of alarm than those which declared what she felt for a father's distress, assured him, in the clearest and most unembarrassed manner, that her son had taken leave of her on the very day after he had settled her in her new house, and she had not seen him since. She then drew a letter from her pocket, and put it into Mr. Fountaine's hand. The date was London, and three weeks before the time of this inquiry: the contents were simple, business-like, yet affectionate: they amounted to no more than this—that the writer was very suddenly ordered off to the Mediterranean, with sealed orders, and that nothing grieved him so much as his total inability to run down for a day into Devon and bid adieu to his mother. So ended Mr. Fountaine's inquiry.

It was many a long year before the fate of Martha became known at the hall.

CHAPTER VII.

Tybalt. What wouldst thou have with me?
Mercutio. Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives; that I mean to make bold withal; and, as you shall use me hereafter, dry beat the rest of the eight. Will you pluck your sword out of its pilcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out.
Tybalt. I am for you.
Romeo. Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up.
Mercutio. Come, sir, your passado.
Romeo. Draw, Benvolio.
Beat down their rapiers; gentlemen, for shame.
Forbear this outrage.

SHAKSPERE.

Mr. FOUNTAINE bore this severe stroke of calamity better than could have been expected from a man of his deep feeling; and who had been so much to blame for the tyrannical

manner in which he had driven on the marriage. But, although everybody gave Martha up for lost, her father never would believe she was dead; and always declared he was convinced that, one day or other, she would come back again (like the Prodigal in the Bible) a repentant woman; and, from this conviction, he never altered his will; so that, if anything happened to him, there was his estate settled on Martha, just as it was before. So contradictory is the human mind that, notwithstanding he had repeatedly threatened Martha that, unless she married Squire Dickons, he would cut her off with a shilling, yet, now that she had left him in so dreadful a manner, and perhaps for ever, he let all he had done for her remain just as he would have done had she proved herself the most dutiful of daughters.

Perhaps the secret of all this might be his conscience. He could not but know that his own tyranny had been the original cause of so much misery, and he might think that, by now showing a relenting and forgiving spirit, in the only way he could show it, to one whom he could not feel certain was dead, he might possibly bribe Heaven to let his runaway child come back again. Be this as it may, the Squire's troubles did not end here; for, in less than twelve months, he had even yet a more serious loss to deplore in that of his second daughter. Two or three pages will be all that is necessary to give the details of the most prominent and painful circumstances connected with that event.

I have but a very imperfect recollection of Miss Amy; but I have often seen her picture. She was quite different from Martha, who was a dark-eyed brunette—for Amy was fair, with light hair and blue eyes; a round and plump form, and a gay and joyous expression about her countenance that won upon the stranger, and made those who knew her best lament that one so well favoured should be so wilful and so wild.

When Miss Martha could no where be found, Squire Dickons began to think he had been at a great expense in having his house new fitted up and painted, and new clothes made for himself and all his servants, on purpose to be married; and now Miss Martha was gone, unless he could get a wife, all the expense would be thrown away; and this he very candidly told Mr. Fountaine. That gentleman thought all the Squire said was true and fair enough, and so over the punch-bowl they settled it between them that Squire Dickons

should marry Miss Amy, and have ten thousand pounds with her instead of the heirship with Miss Martha.

Squire Dickons's first offer had been to toss up which young lady he should take, heads for Miss Amy and tails for Miss Elizabeth: but Mr. Fountaine said no; he could better part with Amy; and so all was soon settled. But Miss Amy no more fancied the Squire than her sister had done before her; for there was, at this time, a very handsome young fellow who had lately joined a strolling company in the neighbourhood; and Miss Amy had seen him play Romeo and Lothario in her father's great barn, and there she had fallen in love with her Romeo. How she carried on the acquaintance nobody knew; but she was always wild and running about as she pleased, and associating with persons much beneath her.

Hannah had her suspicions, and talked to her, and threatened to tell her father; but, on her assuring her that she was mistaken, my mother did not like to call down on Miss Amy her father's anger, and so she said nothing. All the wedding preparations were once more made, and Squire Dickons thought for certain he must this time have a wife.

But a night or two before the appointed day Mr. Fountaine could not sleep; and, as he lay uneasy and awake, he thought he heard a noise in the west gallery. Again he listened, and again it was repeated. He started out of bed, threw on his dressing-gown, and snatching up a pistol that was at his bed's head in the one hand, and a candle in the other, having previously softly opened his door, he descended the stairs with a noiseless step, put down the light behind a screen near the entrance of the gallery, and determined to examine before he ventured further. There was a light within, proceeding from a lamp that burnt feebly on the table; and this served to show the astonished father what was going on.

His daughter Amy, wrapped in a sort of disguise, was at the moment in the act of getting out of the window, assisted by a young man, who, having clambered on to the roof of a lower building, was standing there, with his arm round the young lady's waist. Mr. Fountaine comprehended all in an instant; the meditated elopement of his daughter, and all her levity. He was both a strong and a bold man. He rushed forward; with his left hand he caught Amy by the arm, dragged her from the window, and cast her on the floor;

and, before the man could move or speak, fired at him the pistol which he still held in his right hand. A heavy fall, a deep groan, told that the shot had been aimed with effect.

Apprehensive that his shot had proved fatal, Mr. Fountaine, without the pause of an instant, without even turning to see if Amy had sustained any injury by the manner in which he had hurled her from the window, proceeded to call up the house; and rushed out to learn whether the man at whom he fired was alive or dead. Hannah, who was among the first that arose on hearing the alarm-bell, soon presented herself; and, by the desire of her master, went to give assistance to the wretched Amy.

Mr. Fountaine discovered the victim of his fury lying on the ground, weltering in his blood, but neither dead nor senseless. On being questioned, he answered in a plaintive tone, and in the words Shakspere puts into the mouth of Iago, when he receives a wound from the sword of Othello on the detection of his villainy—"I bleed, sir, but am not hurt."

"That is false," said Mr. Fountaine; "you are hurt, and seriously. But, though you deserve death for the injury you would have done me, yet, I thank God, you have not met it from my hand. Take that fellow up, Tom" (speaking to one of the servants, who had gathered round). "Dick, do you help him. Give him a bed in the hay-loft, and send for the blacksmith; he is nearer than the surgeon; and, as he can stop a vein after bleeding my horses, let him do as much for this man till the surgeon may arrive. And do you, John, take a horse, and ride for your life, and get the doctor. I would not but save this scoundrel, for the pleasure of seeing him hanged at some future time, for half my estate. Tom, hold the light nearer; I think I know the rogue's face. O! is it so? My service to you, Mr. Romeo. Is this the return you make me for taking your benefit in my barn? Away with the fellow, and do as I have directed!"

The rest of the story is most painful. Romeo recovered; but Amy met with a terrible fate. Her imprudence, the injury to her character which would inevitably follow the discovery of her attempt to elope with a strolling player, her fright on supposing that the miserable man had met his death by the hand of her father, her fall on the floor, in which she had received a severe blow on the head, altogether had such an effect upon her that she fell into a sickness,

which speedily turned to a brain-fever. For nearly three weeks Hannah never had one night's rest. At length, ill and worn out with watching, she retired to bed for a few hours, in the hope to get a little sleep, in order to resume, with renovated zeal, her care of the patient. She charged the nurse not for a moment to slumber, or to be off her guard, as Miss Amy, who was delirious, had complained of a burning thirst, and had been exceedingly restless all the day long. Unfortunately, however, the nurse slept.

Having in the midst of her delirium a confused remembrance of things, Amy, it was supposed, in consequence of this parching thirst, stole from her bed in the middle of the night, and, Heaven knows how, managed to find her way unperceived into the flower-garden; for, to the horror of her distressed father and all the family, she was found in the morning dead, lying by the side of the fountain mentioned in an earlier part of my narrative. Whether, when in so dangerous a state, the cold of the night or of the water struck her with a sudden chill, or the quantity of the water she was supposed to have drunk injured her, I cannot tell; but certain it is, that when discovered, soon after daybreak, by the gamekeeper, she did not retain the slightest sign of life.

I will not attempt to describe the distress of Mr. Fountaine on the loss of this his second daughter, within a year after the loss of the first. But his troubles about Amy had not ended yet. On the very day following the funeral, Squire Dickons, who was angered and vexed at being a second time disappointed of a wife, quarrelled with Mr. Fountaine about it. For, having heard all the idle talk of the country round, in which Amy's affair made a great sensation, with the usual exaggerations and malicious inferences that invariably characterise such gossipings, Squire Dickons had been made to believe that Mr. Fountaine sought to marry him to Miss Amy, instead of Miss Elizabeth, in order to hide the disgraceful connection she had for some time formed with the strolling-player.

Mr. Fountaine was justly angered at this suspicion; words grew on words, till the Squire told him that if he were not an old man he would fight him.

Greatly exasperated, Mr. Fountaine exclaimed, "Sir, let age be no hindrance. You have, with equal insolence and falsehood, cast a slur on my honour. And, sir, I would teach

you that none bearing the name of Fountaine ever sat down satisfied under such an imputation till it was washed out in blood!"

"Well, sir: well," cried Squire Dickons, "I'm not the man to fear to back my own words; the thing was said at our club and on our bowling-green: it was said that Miss Amy was no better than she should be, and that you knew it, and therefore wanted to put her off on me; and that, I think, was no fair dealing. Sir, these are injuries that come very near a gentleman's feelings; and so, sir, I shan't eat my words, nor ask pardon for them neither; and as for your daughters, Mr. Fountaine, with all your pride about them, what with the way in which Miss Martha behaved to me, and afterwards Miss Amy, it was with me out of the frying-pan into the fire with the one and the other of them. You seem to think nothing about that; but I think I ought to have some satisfaction—I say nothing about the expense to which I have been run, all to no purpose. But, sir, I'll fight you any day you please."

"Now, at once, sir," said Mr. Fountaine. "There are two swords, sir, over this chimney; choose which you please, and I will take the other, and settle the matter on the spot."

"What, here!" exclaimed Squire Dickons.

"Here; ay, here, sir," said Mr. Fountaine. "I will have no delay. Lock the door, if you please, to prevent interruption; this hall is wide enough for our purpose. And, as you have insulted me by my own hearthstone, by my own hearthstone you shall atone for it."

"But I have not made my will yet—I am not prepared," said Squire Dickons, who, though perfectly willing to combat with single-stick or fisty-cuff, had no great relish for sword or pistol; "upon my word, I can't fight to-day; you are in a devilish hurry."

"You have not been slow, sir," said Mr. Fountaine, "to insult an old man, and an old friend, and an afflicted man, under his own roof, and at the very moment when the heart of a father has been torn by the most cruel injuries, and his child taken from him before she could either sorrow for her fault or he could forgive it. Instead of showing some feeling for these things, you have given another blow worse than all the rest—a stab at my honour, sir, and then you threaten me with your vengeance if I were not an old man. By Heaven, you shall either fight me on the spot, or I will post

you as a fool, a liar, and a poltroon, at your club and on your bowling-green, of which you told me but now, and will cudgel you out of my own house by way of earnest for the same!"

"That you shan't," said Squire Dickons, now exasperated in his turn; "I won't stand such handling as that from any man. Give me one of your swords: I've not handled one for many a long day; but I used to be considered a pretty man once with the rapier. Now Mr. Fountaine, let us to it, and Miss Amy's may not be the last funeral that leaves your hall within the present month."

The late friends prepared to fight; but, in the impatience of their fury for the fray, they fortunately forgot to lock the door, and my mother, hearing a great stamping and raging, did not stay for ceremony, but rushed in just as Mr. Fountaine and Squire Dickons, their coats and wigs off, and with outstretched arms, each holding a naked sword pointed at the other, stood ready to engage in a quarrel for life or death. Hannah, careless of her own safety, ran between them, and, not heeding a straw whether she offended Squire Dickons or not, went up boldly to him and wrenched the sword out of his hand, bidding him be ashamed of himself for thinking to fight with an afflicted man, like her master, and under his own roof.

"But did not Mr. Fountaine want to marry his daughter, Miss Amy, to me, knowing her to be no better than she should be?" said Squire Dickons, staring on Hannah in stupid wonder at the intrepidity with which she compelled him to keep the peace.

"We are none of us any better than we should be," said Hannah. "But, if you mean that Mr. Fountaine knew there was anything improper in his daughter's conduct before the night that, so fatally for his own peace, he discovered her in the act of running away from him, you do him the greatest injustice that ever man did to man. Mr. Fountaine was as innocent in that matter as the babe that is unborn, and I would stake all that is most dear to me in Heaven or on earth that I speak truth."

"And I'll be hanged if you don't!" said Squire Dickons; for there was a simple-minded earnestness in Hannah which, together with her well-known character for probity, seldom failed to carry conviction with it. "I see it all now," he added; "they made a jape of me at the bowling-green, and

I'm an ass and a blockhead. Mr. Fountaine, here's my hand. I have done you wrong, and I beg your pardon; a gentleman can say no more than that he is sorry—not that I say it from fear neither—Mrs. Hannah, please to help me on with my coat. Mr. Fountaine, let's forget and forgive."

"With all my heart, sir," said Mr. Fountaine; "you have asked pardon; and that is quite enough to wipe out an injury in my mind. I forget and forgive."

"Well now, that is kind and neighbourly," said Squire Dickons. "Come, then, a hearty shake" (they shook hands), "and I will marry Miss Elizabeth, in proof that I harbour no resentment, and that there is no grudge between us, if you will give her to me; and the same settlements will do, only altering the Christian name. Mrs. Hannah, please to give me my wig. What say you, Mr. Fountaine—shall Miss Elizabeth be the woman, after all?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Fountaine; "your two projected marriages with my daughters have been so unfortunate that we will not venture on a third."

"And yet they say a third time is lucky," said Squire Dickons. "But, as you will—I don't much care about it; only it is a pity to have settlements drawn and expenses incurred, and all to no purpose."

"Pray spare my feelings, sir, all further allusion to the subject," said Mr. Fountaine. "The wound is yet green; so say no more about it, and come and let us have a bowl of punch in the oak parlour."

"That will do quite as well," said Squire Dickons. "For what principally made me propose for Miss Elizabeth was to be neighbourly, and to show I had no wish to rake up old grievances."

And, so saying, these newly-reconciled enemies and old friends once more hung up their swords over the chimney-piece, and proceeded, the one to forget his lost wife, and the other, if possible, his lost daughter, in the conviviality of the punch-bowl.

CHAPER VIII.

May sorrow, shame, and sickness overtake her,
And all her beauties, like my hopes, be blasted!
ROWE.

GREAT as had been the trials of Mr. Fountaine, still greater were yet in store for him. My mother, ever mindful of the promise she had given to Mrs. Fountaine, determined, cost what it might, that she would endeavour to induce Mr. Fountaine to let his only remaining daughter, the sweetest and most attractive of all his children, see something more of good society than had fallen to the lot of her sisters.

She watched her opportunity, and, one day, when the Squire was in an exceedingly good humour with her for commending the spirited manner in which he had just refused his consent to an impertinent coxcomb who had demanded Miss Elizabeth in marriage, she resolved to begin. Now, she thought, was the favourable moment to act on Mr. Fountaine's judgment, when his feelings were warm towards herself, and his pride irritated against a third person, to whom they were equally averse; for Hannah was not ignorant that if there is a bond of union between two individuals who love fondly the same object, there is, generally speaking, a much stronger one between friends who participate in a sense of irritation towards a third person. Such is the frailty of human nature.

"Sir," said Hannah, "I am afraid we shall be subject to more impertinent offers of this kind unless you permit Miss Elizabeth to see a little more of the world."

"See more of the world!" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine. "Why, Hannah, doesn't she see everybody that you or I see? Doesn't she know every man of the club?—and has not her name been cut, as our standing toast, on the president's drinking-glass, for the last twelve months or more? What can I do more for her?"

"Sir," replied Hannah, "it is not for me to dictate to you; but your own good sense will point out to you that a young lady of family and fortune, such as Miss Elizabeth, should be introduced to those circles where she would be likely to find friends of her own sex worthy of her regard, and to meet with a match that Mr. Fountaine would not deem un-

equal even for his daughter; all this your own good sense and good feeling ——"

"Don't palaver, Hannah," said Mr. Fountaine, "it is not your way. But I see which way the wind sets. You have something in your head that you want to put into mine; and I dare say it is right enough; for, as to my good sense and feeling, I cannot say they have hitherto made me act in the wisest manner possible with my two eldest daughters. I have a great mind to try yours, which I verily believe to be much better, for the youngest: so tell me your plan."

Unless his pride was alarmed, or his passions irritated, Mr. Fountaine did not want for candour, and Hannah now ventured on such tender ground with great prudence; for, whilst she assumed nothing, he granted everything. The object she had in view was this.

Mr. Fountaine's once offending sister, who married against his will, had lately become a considerable person; her husband's fortune being unexpectedly enlarged on the death of a rich relative. Mrs. Hartwell was a well-bred woman, and moved in the best society at Exeter. She had often wished to receive Elizabeth at her house; and if Mr. Fountaine would consent to let her visit there, now and then, for a few weeks, she would be sure to meet with ladies and gentlemen of rank and fortune.

Mr. Fountaine frowned at the name of his runaway sister. But the recollection of his own runaway daughters, if it did not cause him to forgive his sister so far as to renew his intercourse with her in his own person, had at least lowered the tone of his anger and the bitterness of his resentments; and her late acquisition of fortune had its due weight; so that, on second thoughts, he was inclined to let Elizabeth go to her. All was soon arranged; and, a few days after, Mr. Fountaine sent off his favourite daughter, in great style, in the old family coach, drawn by four long-tailed black horses, with a couple of running footmen to attend her progress, on a visit to her aunt at Exeter.

Elizabeth was received with great kindness by Mrs. Hartwell, and was soon introduced into the most fashionable circles of the day in the county. Her youth, beauty, and accomplishments, and the peculiar sweetness of her manners, soon attracted universal admiration; and, when it became known that she was now Mr. Fountaine's only daughter, people, of course, considered her as the sole heiress to all

his great estate, and she was everywhere received with a respect and assiduity which, vain as she was before, half turned her head, and raised in her a fancy that all the world was made to obey her slightest wish or command.

She was now as much indulged as her sisters and herself had once been contradicted. She went where she pleased, saw whom she pleased, and dressed in the first style of fashion. Mrs. Hartwell, who was a kind-hearted, but rather weak woman, instead of checking the perpetual round of gaiety into which Elizabeth was now disposed to plunge, rather encouraged it. She was pleased with the company that the uncommon attractions of her niece drew to her house, and took credit to herself for bringing out such a girl from rustic obscurity: so that, when the time arrived for her return home, another month was begged, and granted by her affectionate father.

One principal object of this delay arose from the wish certain young ladies entertained, that Miss Elizabeth should be present at a ball to be given at the assizes. These ladies, of whom more anon, were two bosom friends of Miss Elizabeth; their very tender friendship having commenced at school. Mr. Fountaine knew nothing of these school-girl intimacies of his daughter, or he would have forbidden them, with all a father's authority. I must here pause to tell wherefore.

If there was one man on the face of the whole earth whom Mr. Fountaine never could forgive, and whom he would have pursued with the most insatiable resentment—one whom he loathed as he would a toad or a viper that lay in his path—it was old Lawyer Quirk, the father of these young ladies. I, who am but acquainted with these matters in their general outline, know not all the circumstances by which the most deadly animosity that ever existed between man and man was kindled between Mr. Fountaine and Mr. Quirk. It arose, I believe, in the first instance, about a lawsuit, in which, by some quibble of the law, the pettifogger outwitted Mr. Fountaine, and gained for his client a most unjust decision. This might have been forgotten, and, in process of time, no doubt would have been so, had not Quirk gloried in his roguery, and publicly boasted of his victory over Mr. Fountaine and his more straightforward legal adviser.

Mr. Fountaine heard of his boasting, and determined to resent it in a manner which would strike deepest into the

feelings of the pettifogger, whom he knew to be an arrant coward. Watching his opportunity at the next quarter sessions, one day when the magistrates and the lawyers of the county flocked into Exeter, Mr. Fountaine suddenly appeared among them, in the common room at the inn. Quirk was in the midst of his compeers: he was a little man; Mr. Fountaine a tall and a powerful one. The latter entered with a horse-whip in his hand, and with that air of cruel but grave determination which a rogue and a coward likes not to see in the man he has injured, without the pause of a minute, without stopping to give a good-morrow to any one of the gentlemen present, strode up to Quirk, and said, with a stern voice, that made the little lawyer shrink and tremble, and turn white as his cravat, "Sir, I understand you make your boast over me, for having gained, by your rascally tricks of the law, a cause in which honour and right were allowed by all to be on my side. Now, sir, I owe you something on the occasion; I will no longer delay to pay you; and here will be witnesses enough, without requiring from you any further acknowledgment for the settlement of the same."

And so saying, Mr. Fountaine caught little Quirk by the collar, threw himself into a chair, and the pettifogger across his knees, and gave him two or three smart strokes with his whip, as a master would flog a schoolboy who had played truant. "There, sir, boast of that," said Mr. Fountaine, and, once more setting the shaking attorney down upon his legs, left the room, followed by many of the gentlemen present, who were not sorry to see the chastisement given to a man who bore so ill a character as little Quirk.

The whipped attorney had nothing to boast of; even though the laws he had so often perverted were in this case on his side, and open to do him such justice as they could administer to sweeten a flogging. Quirk talked big of actions and what not, but he did nothing. Probably he feared still further to incense a man so determined as Mr. Fountaine, and one who might take other and more legal modes of vengeance to expose some of his evil practices, should the pettifogger venture into a court. But, though he pocketed his whipping, he failed not to treasure up the memory of it, as a deposit in the stores of hatred upon which he proposed to require a large interest, ere he would grant a final settlement of the account. He determined to make it a chancery suit among quarrels, which should be drawn out year after year, and never have an end.

Many years had indeed elapsed since this quarrel took place; and Quirk, who originally was not worth a shilling—by a shrewd and not very creditable practice—by taking up any unfair cause, and making the best of it; by getting an executorship, and the management of two or three estates of minors, where there was wealth and witless guardians, had altogether, Heaven knows how, contrived to get rich, to become master of a fine house, to drive a pair of horses, to display a livery on his servants' backs, and a gold-laced coat on his own, and to make both his sons gentlemen. One he intended for the bar; the other was a captain in the army; whilst his daughters were sent to the most fashionable boarding-school in Exeter. There, in spite of the wrath of their sires, the Misses Quirk became the intimate friends of Miss Elizabeth Fountaine. On the visit of the latter to her aunt, this charming intimacy was renewed; but, as the girls, being a little older, began to hear and to comprehend something of the animosity of their sires, they deemed it by no means necessary to report at their several homes the renewal of their acquaintance.

I have stated that the Misses Quirk had been importunate with Miss Elizabeth Fountaine that she should stay for the assize ball: at length the happy night arrived. What young lady does not remember a first ball: the dressing for it; the delight of seeing the new-made clothes look well; and the pride on a glance at the glass, that the wearer looks well in them; the excitement of a crowded room, filled with glad faces, with men and women all under the influence of pleasure; the apprehension in thinking all eyes to be fixed on her who enters on her first ball, and the secret satisfaction of fancying those eyes approve? Then the handsome partner, the inspiration of the music, of the dance; the slight flutter of the nerves on observing the earnest gaze, the eager attention, and the gentle tones of words sweetly spoken by that pleasing partner; and, as it sometimes happens, to find, from all these circumstances combined, he has received an impression that will not end with the hour.

Such are the recollections of many a young lady respecting her first ball; and such were those of Miss Elizabeth Fountaine. The graceful partner, whose handsome face and red coat produced so great a sensation, not only in her bosom but throughout all the room, was no less a person than Captain Quirk, lately come down into the neighbourhood on duty,

and introduced to Miss Elizabeth Fountaine, on that memorable evening, by his very amiable sisters. It was afterwards said, those young ladies had very kindly given their brother a hint by letter, that, if he could manage just then to come on a recruiting party to Exeter, he possibly might get some desirable men for his Majesty's service, and a very pretty wife for his own—an heiress to boot.

The Psalmist says of the crafty man, "He hath graven and digged up a pit, and is fallen himself into the destruction that he made for other." These expressions may be applied to the devices of Captain Quirk. He had an eye to the heiress of so great a fortune; he came to Exeter with the full intent and purpose of making Miss Elizabeth Fountaine fall in love with him, and before the evening was over he fell in love, and most deeply, with her. I do not know all particulars; but it was not very long, I apprehend, before the young people fully understood each other, and agreed to be married, let what would be the result. Aware of the mortal enmity that subsisted between their sires, neither of them ever thought of such a thing as asking old Mr. Fountaine's consent.

But the Captain was not a little surprised, indeed absolutely astonished, when he found that his own father, who, he thought, would have moved Heaven and earth to marry him to an heiress, raised objections to the match, and told him that, if he married Miss Elizabeth, he would cut him off with a shilling.

Not only did old Quirk cherish the most inveterate hatred against Mr. Fountaine and all his race, but he felt quite sure that the Squire would never give his daughter a penny if she married the son of his ancient foe. And, moreover, he had learnt from his new clerk, Mr. Pounce, who was just come into his office (after having left that of Mr. Fountaine's attorney), that the Squire had not altered his will. Pounce knew every word of it; he had, in fact, engrossed it himself, and had heard Mr. Fountaine express his determination never to change one word of the settlement of the estate made in that will in favour of Miss Martha and her heirs; and there was no proof whatever that Miss Martha was dead. Missing she was; but she might come back and establish her identity, even twenty years hence, and then what would become of the claim of Miss Elizabeth? He (Mr. Quirk), even should he live to handle the case, under such circumstances, would not

give five shillings for Miss Elizabeth's chance to retain possession, and annul her sister's right. He, therefore, could not think for a moment of giving up his old grudge towards Mr. Fountaine, only to oblige his son, who was in love. He forbade him, therefore, altogether to think of Mr. Fountaine's daughter, which, could the Squire have known it, would have pleased him so much that it would have gone further than anything else to procure from him the attorney's full pardon.

The Captain, who, though he had no objection to Miss Fountaine being an heiress, was really in love with herself, and not with her money, suffered his father to talk on; but left him just as determined as before to persevere in his suit, and win the lady. Miss Elizabeth, who never could look on a red coat with indifference, and was still more charmed with it when seen on a very handsome young man, had long since resolved that nothing would do but an officer for her husband. As to the prudence or imprudence of any such connection, she never once troubled herself about it; or, if it ever crossed her mind, she balanced it by the thoughts of all the charms annexed to regimental balls, to living in camp, or in a garrison town, and walking out every day to hear the band play on parade.

Soon after her acquaintance had commenced with Captain Quirk she was summoned home. On her return, she all at once found out that nothing did her so much good as daily riding, and begged her father to allow her the exercise. Mr. Fountaine, who at this time had the gout, could not accompany her. He, however, not only consented, for the sake of her health, but gave his darling child a very fine horse, and a steady groom was appointed to attend her. Somehow or other, she always contrived to send this servant on a message, or to get rid of him for half an hour or so. How little did Mr. Fountaine suspect in whose company she spent the half-hours in which she managed to be free from her attendant! How little did he dream of the cruel blow which this, his dearest girl, was preparing for him!

Mr. Fountaine had loved Elizabeth as he had never loved a human creature. True it is, in respect to his daughters, that he had preferred Martha in the matter of the heirship. But he had done so from a motive of justice; from a religious respect in favour of the elder born. Mr. Fountaine, though proud, was not one who cared for money with any mean or

mercenary views. He never thought money the supreme good in life, and therefore never cared much about it for his darling Elizabeth. I have said he was a proud man, but his pride was that of blood and family; and for Elizabeth he would not have deemed the first nobleman in the kingdom too great a match.

From the hour the beautiful child of five years old had been placed in his arms by her dying mother, notwithstanding all his rough manners and rude habits, Mr. Fountaine considered her as a sacred charge, as the last pledge of his wife's affection for him. He had loved the girl with more than a father's fondness; indeed I might almost say he had watched over her with all the tenderness of a mother's care. As she grew up, her uncommon beauty, the quickness of her parts, and those accomplishments which in his way he had endeavoured to afford her, were all to him so many themes of delight; whilst the sweetness of her disposition rejoiced his very heart. When with Elizabeth Mr. Fountaine was another being; his affection for his daughter seemed, for the time, to inspire him with a refinement, a susceptibility, that no other living creature could call forth.

"She never angers me," would he say; and his cheek would glow and his eye glisten at her approach. He had pride, a manly pride, in his daughter. As he saw her enter a room, how often would he exclaim, "Is she not a fine girl, and good as she is beautiful, I can assure you." Such commendations, uttered in a very audible voice, could not fail to be heard by the young lady herself, and would frequently call up a smile and a blush in the fair cheek of his child, which did but make her look the more lovely, to confirm a father's praise.

I have stated Mr. Fountaine was ill with the gout; I know not exactly how it all happened, nor if it were during this fit, or whilst he was confined with another, but the gout he had upon him, when, one day, his respectable attorney, Lawyer Sheriff, accompanied only by Hannah, came unexpectedly into his room, to break to him, as gently and as gradually as the circumstances they had to announce would admit, the most painful and undreamt of news—that his daughter Elizabeth had eloped with Captain Quirk.

Mr. Fountaine stared; he heard the news—the name—without seeming at first to comprehend what was said. But, when at length he was made clearly to understand the extent

of the calamity that had befallen him, that his favourite child had for ever left him, and with the son of his greatest enemy, his grief was too deep for anger; it appeared to break him down at once, like a stroke from a thunder-cloud; he was overwhelmed by it. He sank back on his pillow; groan after groan burst from him; the shock threw the gout into his stomach; nobody expected he could live; and the words, "*She has murdered me!*" was all of reproach that Hannah could distinctly understand. But Mr. Fountaine was of a robust constitution; and, in spite of his extreme illness, the distress of his mind, and probably his own wishes (for death would have been welcome to him), he lived.

No sooner was the violence of his gout once more subdued, and he able to sit up, than he expressed a wish to see Hannah and her husband alone. He considered both, especially the housekeeper, more as faithful friends than as mere dependants of the family. Some days having passed since he had been made acquainted with his daughter's rash marriage, they hoped to find him more composed. In one sense he was so. But, as it soon appeared, neither the nature of his exasperated feelings was softened, nor the depth of his mental distress in any way lessened, by the sharp bodily pains he had endured.

As they entered the room, they were struck with his altered appearance. He was sitting in an easy-chair by the fireside; his feet, like his head, resting on pillows; his countenance pale, from the severity of his recent sufferings and the medicines he had taken to reduce the disease. But there was no dejection about him; nothing of that languid air which might be expected in a man so visited by affliction, both of body and mind. Quite the reverse; there was a calm and determined expression in his countenance, with a rigidity of feature, the result of deep-fixed passion, such as Hannah had never before seen in him. His brows were knit, his eyes full and open; and, ever and anon as he spoke, those eyes flashed with a light which was not natural. Deep must be the resentment that could make itself so apparent in a man who was, as it were, just risen from the bed of death.

"Hannah," said Mr. Fountaine, "I am glad you are come; and I am glad that Thomas is come with you. I have some orders to give in my family, which it is as well should be

known to you both, that you may both exert yourselves to see them enforced. I thank you, Hannah, for your kindness and your care in nursing me. I believe you have helped to save my life. But I do not know if I ought to thank you for that as a service, when my own flesh and blood have rebelled against me, to cut it short."

Hannah, who was much touched with these acknowledgments, could not restrain her tears. Mr. Fountaine seldom, if ever, thanked any of his dependants, always considering their services merely as matters of duty, however well performed; his thanks, therefore, had in them that peculiar value which is always attached to what is rare. She expressed her sense of such acknowledgments with grateful respect.

"And now hear me, Hannah," continued Mr. Fountaine, "and hear me without interruption; for I have a long speech to make; much to say: and, as I intend never to speak on this subject again, I will say all I have to say now, and have done with it. Give me some of the drops before I begin."

Hannah obeyed; she took the cup from her master, after he had swallowed the drops, with a trembling hand.

"I see you are afraid of what is coming, Hannah," said Mr. Fountaine. "No wonder; for you can guess what it is; that it is of a cruel and ungrateful subject I have to speak —my daughter."

"Sir," said Hannah, "better not talk of it; at least, not yet."

"Yes; now or never, Hannah," he replied. "Listen then, for I will be obeyed; and it will be worse for you and me too if I am not."

There was that air of determination about Mr. Fountaine as he said this with which Hannah was too well acquainted to think of contradiction. She submitted, therefore, in silence; and he thus continued,

"Yes, it is of my daughter I would speak—my daughter Elizabeth. How fondly I have loved her! From the hour her dying mother gave her into these arms she has been all my happiness and all my care. I loved her sisters, and was grieved for their loss—God knows how truly! But my love for either of them was never like the love I felt for her. I have been a good father—I have done my best for a set of ungrateful children; and see how I am requited."

Mr. Fountaine paused; his voice failed him, and, in spite of all his high resolution, he wept aloud. Hannah dared not interrupt him; but she gave him the sympathy of her tears, and the eyes of Thomas were not dry.

"Ay," continued Mr. Fountaine, "such is it to have children; we covet curses instead of blessings when we covet them. And yet, bad as all mine have behaved to me, none have been so ungrateful as Elizabeth. I believe, though meaning all for her good, I might have driven things too hard with Martha; and I was not watchful enough with Amy. But Elizabeth—she never knew from me other than the most unbounded indulgence, and I watched over her with love that was like a mother's. No Slashing Dick was ever proposed to her. I was only anxious she should marry well; and the first lord in the land was not too good for her in my mind. She was all my pride. Dotard that I was, I loved her so much—I lived in her, and could have died for her, and see how she has requited a father's affection! She has left the old man in his age, not heeding even her mother's grave, nor his grey hairs. She has abandoned him and her home, and left both for ever, and for the son of his most cruel enemy! But my resolution is taken; she shall not break this heart——" and he added, striking his hand vehemently on his bosom as he spoke: "No, by Heaven! she shall not—I repeat it; my resolution is taken. I will cast her off—yes, for ever cast her off; and—the viper, I will curse her and hers for ever!"

"Oh, sir, do not!—do not!" exclaimed Hannah and Thomas in one breath. "Think—she is your child."

"It is false! I swear it is false!" said Mr. Fountaine, with passion. "She neither is nor shall be child of mine more. I whistle her off, as I would a bird from my hand. If Martha still lives and ever comes home again, all I have shall be hers, or whosesoever belongs to her. But for Elizabeth! her ingratitude has grieved me to the very soul. She is the viper, and I feel her sting. Yes, I do curse her; in the sight of God and man a father's curse shall fall upon her head—her ungrateful head; and, if she have a child, may the offspring she bears become as accursed as herself!"

"Oh, sir! my dear master!" said Hannah—"a father lifting up his voice to curse his child! Oh, sir! do not be thus cruel—thus unnatural; for, remember, it is your own flesh and blood on whom the curse will fall. Oh, sir! recal it—

recal it ere it is too late, and may God forgive you the sin in the repentance for it!"

"I will not—no, I will not recal it," said Mr. Fountaine, his eye glancing wildly around. "I thought I heard some other voice speak to me, Hannah, and not yours. It seemed to come from behind my chair, and, like you, to say—Recal the curse. But I will not—no, I will not. If I am become hard-hearted and stubborn, her ingratitude has made me such, and she must bear the consequences. Do not you stand there crying; but hear my commands. Hear them both of you, and then trouble me no more about this wicked daughter."

He paused a moment, and then resumed—"I charge you, Hannah, who know all about the rooms of my house and all my ways—I charge you that you see everything that belonged to this viper—for by no other name would I call her—removed before I leave this chamber, so that nothing may come across me to remind me of her. Away with her portrait, which hangs in the oak parlour, and burn it if you will. Away with all her books, and her harpsichord; let nothing remain. And do you, Thomas, see that the little arbour I built to please her fancy be torn down, and her flower-beds broken up. I had thoughts to have ordered the horse on which she rode out so often to deceive me to be shot. But in this, second thoughts are best; the animal had no part in the ingratitude of the rider of him, so I will spare the creature. But, look you, send it away, or give it away somewhere—anywhere, so that it never more meets my eyes. And do you, Thomas and Hannah, charge every friend who inquires for me, or comes to my house, and every servant and every dependant, that they never name her name in my presence, for if any, the dearest of my friends, did so, I would turn my back on him as I would on an insulting foe; and, if a servant or dependant dared thus disobey, I would for such insolence turn him from my doors for ever!"

"Sir!" said Hannah, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes," exclaimed Mr. Fountaine, "you—even you—should go in such a case; and so, by disobeying my commands on this subject, you would leave for ever, and in his misery, one who has not been an unkind master to you, and to whom you are now become the only living creature left to him to whom he can turn with any hope of comfort."

"Sir," replied Hannah, "I must not—I will not disobey

you; all shall be as you order it. But O, sir! this is a sad hour. What would my poor mistress have said had she lived to see it?"

"I thank God she does not live to see it," exclaimed Mr. Fountaine, "and that is the first time I have thanked God for her death since I lost her. But no more of this—Thomas, do you understand my orders?".

"Yes, sir, I do," said Thomas, "and will see them all fulfilled and obeyed."

"That is well," replied Mr. Fountaine. "I find I have yet some left who will be faithful to me; who know their duty—but they are not daughters. Now, then, there remains but one thing more for me to do—Hannah, look what an old fool your master has been."

Mr. Fountaine put his hand in his pocket, and, as he spoke, drew forth a pocket-book, opened it deliberately, took out a piece of white silver paper that was carefully folded, and drew from it a long lock of fair curling hair, as bright as gold.

"Hannah," he continued, "this is a lock of her hair; I cut it off myself—fool that I am, I could be fond of it now!" He pressed it to his lips and imprinted on it a fervent kiss. "But no; I will not, I will not," he added—"I will think only of her ingratitude; and so, even as this, shall perish all my affection for her."

He threw the beautiful lock of hair on the top of the burning wood. It soon caught the flame. He never moved his eyes from it till it was consumed. "And now," he exclaimed, striking his hand upon the table, "and now I will name her no more, so help me God!"

He kept his word. But, though he remained silent, all saw how he suffered.

Mr. Fountaine, once in his way so happy, was now become a childless, melancholy old man. Nothing interested him, nothing gave him joy, and he seemed to be gradually sinking into that grave which had been prepared for him by the ingratitude of this his most beloved daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

She ceased, and turned upon her pillow; pale
She lay, but her dark eyes flashed through her tears,
Like skies that rain and lighten; as a veil,
Waved and o'ershading her wan cheek, appears
Her streaming hair, the full curls strive, but fail,
To hide the glossy shoulder, which uprears
In snow through all; her soft lips lie apart,
And louder than her breathing beats her heart.

BYRON.

Two years after these events had occurred, on a stormy winter's night, when (to use the words of Hannah, whom I have so often heard tell the tale) "scarcely a dog would go out if he could stay in," Mr. Fountaine was seated in the oak parlour. It had more than one door. That leading into a long gallery towards the park and the garden was seldom, if ever, used by any of the servants, as the door that led to their apartments through the hall was on the opposite side of the room.

Mr. Fountaine was alone; for Hannah, after having given him his tea and thrown some billets on the fire that burnt low on the hearth, had retired, leaving him to his own melancholy mood, in which he was now more than ever fond of indulging without interruption.

The oak parlour, like his own thoughts, was dark and cheerless; the wood fire smouldered, but did not blaze, and two candles with long wicks, that stood in an old-fashioned silver branch on the table, by their insufficient light served rather to show than to dispel the gloom that hung around, whilst of the old family portraits on the walls nothing could be distinguished in such obscurity but their general outline; and this, with their sombre dresses and dark backgrounds, to a fanciful imagination might suggest the idea of so many mourners, standing silent around. The portrait of the late Mrs. Fountaine hung over the fireplace; it looked pale and sad. To the right of it were seen the pictures of Martha and Amy. Next to these there was one vacant panel, which appeared discordant and unseemly in a room where all the other panels were filled with paintings of a large size. In that vacant space had once hung the portrait of Elizabeth. In accordance with the commands of Mr. Fountaine, Hannah had removed it; but strange to say,

though she had proposed to fill up the gap with a picture taken from another room, he had never allowed any other to be hung up in the place.

In this gloomy apartment, and with a mind no less sad, sat Mr. Fountaine, listening to the wind, as it blew in loud gusts around the walls of his old mansion, and to the rain and hail, as they pattered heavily against the windows. His eye, for the moment, rested on the dusky portrait of his wife above the chimney, when he heard a slight noise, followed by the door that led from the gallery opening suddenly, and in rushed what (I repeat Hannah's own words) seemed, on the first glance, to be "a moving bundle of dirty rags." It tottered forward, and with a groan dropped at Mr. Fountaine's feet. The old gentleman started up and rang the bell with violence. Hannah and her husband both ran in.

Great was their astonishment when they beheld, on entering, their master standing and apparently supporting himself by holding on the back of his chair; he was speechless, but he pointed instantly to the lump that lay at his feet, which, till that moment, they had not seen. They looked again at Mr. Fountaine, and observed, by the twitching and working of his face, which was white as death, that he was shaken and convulsed with passion.

Hannah, amazed, alarmed, yet scarcely knowing what she had to fear, seeing Mr. Fountaine still point to the insensible object at his feet, stooped down to examine it. Thomas almost instinctively did the same.

"Good God!" exclaimed Hannah, "it is a dead woman; how came she here?"

"No, no," said Thomas, "she lives!"

A part of her apparel had fallen over her face as she fell at Mr. Fountaine's feet. Hannah proceeded to pull away this portion of her wet clothes, when, on doing so, she instantly exclaimed, "O, Heavens, sir! it is——" She stopped, knowing well the penalty did she but pronounce the name that trembled on her lips.

"Which—which of them?" inquired Mr. Fountaine, who now, for the first time, found his tongue, in a voice of eager impatience.

"The youngest, sir," said Hannah, still afraid to speak the name.

"Away with her to the dunghill!" cried Mr. Fountaine, in a voice that was stentorian in its loud and vehement in-

tonation. "Away with her, this moment!—away with her, lest I trample her under foot in my fury!"

"O, sir!" said Thomas, and "O, sir!" said Hannah; "Mercy, mercy to your child!"

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Hannah, "she is about to become a mother! the shock has brought on her hour. Think of this, sir; O mercy, sir, mercy!"

"Away with her!" shouted Mr. Fountaine, rather than spoke his commands; "away with her, I say, or I may crush the young viper that is yet but in the shell!"

As he spoke these last words he threw himself into his chair, trembling, exhausted with the vehemence of his passion. He looked absolutely maddened with anger.

Thomas and Hannah, as well as they could, took his unfortunate daughter up between them, for fear he should make good his threat, and literally trample on her in the excess of his rage. They carried her out of the apartment, and then, summoning further aid, Hannah caused her to be conveyed to one of the housemaid's bedrooms, that was situated at the extreme end of the house, and looked towards the garden. She chose this room because it was remote from Mr. Fountaine, and in a part of the dwelling where he never came.

With the assistance of the girl, whose bed was now destined to receive so wretched a creature, Hannah took off her wet clothes, and was shocked to find they were literally rags, such as, in the day of their pride, not one of Mr. Fountaine's daughters would have deemed good enough to bestow upon a beggar that asked charity at their father's gate. Hannah put on her some linen of her own, and got the unhappy creature into bed as soon as she possibly could. She was anxiously expecting the return of a servant, whom, without a moment's delay, Thomas, on the first alarm, had despatched to the village, in order to procure the immediate attendance of an old woman, whose presence was required on all like occasions among the farmers' wives the country round. It was too late to send for the doctor, who was some miles distant, and moreover Hannah feared Mr. Fountaine too much to call in a man who was one of the very few persons he still held in favour, and with whom he was still on terms of intimacy and friendship.

Before the old woman arrived, Hannah gave the miserable creature a warm cordial, as she seemed to be sinking, and, in

less than two hours after, Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter —to a child who seemed fated from that very hour to be unfortunate.

So exceedingly ill was the unhappy mother, that for many hours she remained speechless, and appeared to be rapidly sinking. She repeatedly pointed to the ring upon her finger, and sighed, and looked as if she would intimate that she felt conscious all her sorrows arose from her rash and most imprudent marriage.

Hannah became seriously alarmed at her condition, and determined, let what would be the consequence, even if she displeased Mr. Fountaine, to procure proper advice for his daughter.

The doctor's attendance was accordingly procured; he thought very badly of the case, and that, unless some great and unexpected change took place, she could not survive many hours. Strong cordial medicines were administered, as he considered her to be sinking from exhaustion. No wonder that it was so; as from the state of her clothes and shoes it was apparent she had walked far through the storm, probably unrefreshed by food. From her acquaintance with the house she had been enabled to effect her entrance into it unseen by any one of the servants.

The medicines were so far beneficial that she recovered the perfect use of her speech and of her senses, though for a short time. Hannah hoped there was a chance for life. During this interval, the unhappy woman appeared desirous to give some account of herself; and, though she spoke with many breaks and pauses, yet she managed to communicate much that was of deep interest to Hannah.

"Let me speak while my senses remain; for I shall lose them again when I think of where I am, and all that has passed, and all the misery I have suffered since I left my father's house, for one who, Hannah, I must say it, has proved to me a hard-hearted, cruel husband. Yes, Hannah, when he found that not only my father, but his own, had cast him off, in consequence of his marriage with me, and we had no hope to find help from any friend, all his love changed. He looked on me as the sole cause of his poverty and suffering, and hatred was not slow to follow so unkind a thought. We had one child; it died soon after it was born; happy had it been for me had I then died too, and had we found but one grave. But I was spared for greater misery—for still fur-

ther trial. My husband, as he was hopeless of a reconciliation with our families and friends, became reckless, and by his extravagance was soon obliged to sell his commission for our support. But nothing made him prudent, debt on debt still accumulated; he was thrown into prison, and then came misery and ruin, till death closed the scene; for in the prison of Newgate my husband fell a sacrifice to the gaol fever, which prevailed there to a fearful extent.

"After his death, I was turned out of the prison; I was friendless, penniless. Hannah, it is a simple truth, that when I was turned from the sheltering walls of Newgate—for such they were to me; I passed the first night on the steps of the door of the prison; my thoughts became desperate as my condition; the great prompter to sin was not slow to bid me despair—and to finish all my sin and sorrow by self-destruction. But, I thank God, I did not give myself up to the strong temptation. I was likely to become a mother; I determined I would go home to my father, and, like the penitent prodigal in the Gospel, go in my rags and my poverty, not, however, to beg a father's care, but only that I might be permitted to die, a repentant wretch, at his feet.

"I had no friend to shelter me; for, what with debt and borrowing, my husband had tired out all who had been kind to us. Yet, notwithstanding the state to which I was reduced, I determined to inquire my way out of London, and to walk down into the West of England as well as I could, still hoping to be spared, so that I might die under my father's roof; and there I shall die. Yes, Hannah, I shall die; and O, wretched woman that I am! unforgiven by him! —and if by him!—I fear unforgiven by God also! How has my heart yearned towards him! How has misery taught me to know the full extent of the punishment due to the sin of disobedience!

"Hannah, I have been weeks on the road—I have walked day after day, to reach this place; sometimes, almost famishing from want of food, I have begged at the doors even of the poor for a morsel of bread and a cup of water, so that I might sustain life, till I could render it up at my father's feet. O, Hannah! I am come at last, but to what a welcome! My father spurned me, turned from me with loathing, as he would from a viper that had started up in his path."

Hannah shuddered. After another pause, Elizabeth thus

continued. "Yet I am in my father's house, Hannah; and, though he will not see me, nor forgive me, I shall die under his roof. I will thank God for that—it is more than I deserve. O, Hannah! could I but have had his forgiveness, I might have died in peace."

Hannah, who knew well how vain would be any appeal to Mr. Fountaine, dared not suggest to his wretched daughter the hope that she might soften him, and obtain from him forgiveness for his child. She wept, she prayed for her dear young lady, and did her best to comfort her. With this view, she brought to her the poor infant. But, although the mother cast her languid eyes upon the babe, she seemed unmoved by any yearnings of affection towards it; all she said was, "Poor little wretch, pray for its death."

It was evident her mind was beginning again to wander; for she asked Hannah, once or twice, how long it would be before her father came to take her out of that horrid prison; and if her husband was yet buried; and why the babe was not put into his coffin. Then she paused; but, in a few minutes after, said, she feared her father would never suffer her to be buried by her mother's side; she was not good enough for that; but he would keep her above ground to curse her.

Hannah shuddered; her very blood ran cold as she heard the poor sufferer in the height of her delirium say the very things of her father that approached so nearly the truth. Thus did the mind of the unhappy creature wander all night. The morning came; its cold light stole through the window, and settled on a corpse as cold; for Elizabeth had died in an interval of quiet, which Hannah fancied was one of sleep. It proved so, indeed—the sleep of death.

CHAPTER X.

One there was
Who, not among the mourners, mourned the most.
ANONYMOUS.

I, WHO was the only child of Thomas and Hannah, and was at this time married, and the mother of an infant, about six weeks old, had come to see my mother at the Hall, bringing

with me my babe. My husband was a most respectable farmer, one much above the ordinary agriculturist, and a well-educated man; he was a tenant of Mr. Fountaine. I had intended to return home on the evening of the very day in which the unhappy Elizabeth so unexpectedly presented herself before her father. But, so severe had been the storm, I could not possibly go through it, with the infant in my arms; my mother, therefore, insisted that I and the babe should stay all night with her at the Hall.

Thus, then, did Providence, by a surprising concurrence of circumstances, so order all for His own merciful ends, that the very storm which hastened the death of poor Elizabeth, and the birth of her child, was the means, by detaining me at the Hall, of providing for it, or it must have perished with its mother.

All was speedily arranged; and, from that hour, I took the sole charge of the sweet infant, who might truly be called a daughter of adversity; and thus did God give her one who could supply to her the place of a mother, at the very hour he took her own from this sad world.

That night, when Thomas attended his master, he found him perfectly calm, but he did not speak, and all was done in profound silence. Indeed, all matters of attendance upon Mr. Fountaine proceeded like clockwork; for Hannah and Thomas knew his ways so well, they could, in general, anticipate not only his wants but his wishes; and, as he was an exceedingly good master, he was obeyed willingly, though not at all times without a feeling of fear and awe. That night he made no inquiries, and Thomas dared tell him nothing. He saw his master to bed; examined and put the pistols in the same place in which they had been hung for the last twenty years, near his bed's head; lighted the lamp, drew the curtains, and, not without some hesitation, ventured to ask, if his honour wanted anything more.

The simple monosyllable "No," very shortly pronounced, was all the answer he obtained, and Thomas closed the door for the night.

On the morrow, Hannah felt the responsibility of her situation, and endeavoured to prevail with the doctor, who had called early, not knowing his patient was dead, to announce to Mr. Fountaine that his daughter was no more. The doctor declined the office, for he well knew what were the feelings of the father on the subject of his youngest

daughter; and he stood too well with his friend and patron to care to risk giving offence. The worthy attorney, Mr. Sheriff, likewise called in soon after; for he had heard something of the matter from the communication of the servants at the Hall with his footboy on the previous evening. He likewise declined having anything to say on so delicate a subject; telling Hannah that he was sure, if he did but mention the name of the unfortunate young lady to Mr. Fountaine, he would throw him out of the window, or shut the door in his face. Thomas absolutely refused even to look at his master in a way that could be construed into giving him any information about the matter. Under all these circumstances, Hannah felt that, of necessity, she must take upon herself the whole affair.

Ever since the elopement of his youngest daughter, when he was alone, she had generally presided at Mr. Fountaine's table. Great was the terror with which, on that morning, she prepared to attend him, whilst the scene of death she had so lately witnessed was yet, as it were, before her eyes. It was only by the strongest effort that she could restrain her tears.

She opened the door of the breakfast-room softly, as if afraid, by the slightest movement, to break the silence that prevailed within. As she entered she observed Mr. Fountaine sitting in the chair he had occupied on the previous night, when he was surprised by the return of his daughter. The table was close to him; he leaned upon it with both his elbows, whilst his face was buried in his hands; she heard him sigh in a manner that indicated strong suffering. She paused; should she retreat? Would he not be angry if he knew she had seen even these tokens of his sorrow?

But, ere she could decide what to do, by some slight movement Mr. Fountaine became sensible of her presence; and, as he looked round, she was yet more shocked. In his countenance, sunk and haggard, there was the undefinable look which ever betrays a want of sleep; and his eye red and bloodshot, with something of wildness in its expression, indicated the existence of strong, though, for the moment, struggling and suppressed, passions. He was without his wig, his hair dishevelled; and there was altogether a negligence about his person that marked the state of his mind.

Shocked at his appearance, and fearful to approach, Hannah made a step or two towards the door; when, quietly throwing

himself back in his chair, Mr. Fountaine said, "Come in, Hannah, and make my tea."

She obeyed. Some minutes passed in unbroken silence; several letters lay on the table. Mr. Fountaine saw them. He took them up, broke the seals, opened one, and then put it down, unread. Hannah stood opposite to him, busied with the tea-things. As he laid down the papers he looked up. Their eyes met, for hers had been fixed on him. What an interchange of thought (even instantaneous as thought itself) can eye meeting eye convey, when under feelings of deep emotion! "Well, Hannah," he said, without further pause; "why do you not speak? Tell your news at once."

"She is dead, sir," replied Hannah, understanding and instantly obeying him.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, with a full respiration, as if a load were removed from his breast; but he turned pale as death as he said it, and his eyelids twinkled and quivered, as if he would not suffer the tear that started into his eyes to flow. He took up the cup, and swallowed the tea with vehemence. Hannah, not knowing what to do or say, stood riveted to the spot, expecting, with a feeling of awe, what would come next; a father having thanked God for the death of his own daughter.

Another pause of dread for Hannah ensued; Mr. Fountaine looked at her. He started, and seemed, on the sudden, to recollect himself: "And the child?" he said.

"It lives, sir," replied Hannah. "What am I to do with it?"

"Anything you will," he said, "so long as you keep the young viper from my sight. But," added he, with something of that sternness which at times made every one of his dependants feel terror as they stood before him, "but you know my commands about the wretched mother; respecting her, though dead, they are the same, and the same for this child. See that not the least of them is broken, or it shall be worse for you, and for us all. I am not now, Hannah, to be so easily managed as you once found me. I am grown old now, and old things are stubborn—at least, I am so."

"Sir," said Hannah, who never forfeited Mr. Fountaine's favour, because she never attempted to prevail with him in his more obdurate moments; "sir, you shall be obeyed." And, having said this, and knowing how much he disliked a word more than necessary in reply to an arbitrary command,

she remained still, neither moving to the right nor the left, patiently awaiting his further commands.

"It is well," said Mr. Fountaine, after a long pause. "And now, Hannah, what makes you stay here? I would much rather be alone."

"I wait your last orders, sir."

Mr. Fountaine looked at her, as if he did not understand her drift; there was something of doubt and distress in his countenance. She hastened to relieve him.

"Where, sir," she inquired, in a solemn yet respectful manner, "where am I to bury"—she was about to say *your daughter;* but, knowing how hateful was that word to Mr. Fountaine's ear, she checked herself, and finished the sentence by saying—"*the dead.*" Yet the suppression of the word that presented itself most naturally to her had cost her a painful effort; and, in spite of all her resolutions, she burst into tears.

Mr. Fountaine did not chide her. "Bury the dead!" he exclaimed, repeating her words, and laying a strong emphasis on *the dead*, as if he weighed all the terrible import of those expressions in his own mind,

"Why, in the family vault—at midnight—as private as possible, and next to her"—he looked up, and pointed to the portrait of his deceased wife that hung above the chimney, as he spoke this last command.

Hannah received it in silence, but trembled greatly. Again he threw himself back in his chair, and she prepared to leave him, without speaking another word. Before, however, she had gained the door, as if in that short interval he had summoned to his aid all the strong resolution of his character, he said, in a voice perfectly calm and clear, "Remember, to-morrow, at midnight. But, after the funeral, let no one of my household appear in mourning. You, Hannah, however, may wear whatever you please—so, now leave me."

On the night of the following day, whilst the wind sighed and moaned in accordance with the melancholy ceremony that was to take place in the village church, about half a mile from the old Hall; as the moon gave a fitful light through stormy clouds that drove swiftly in succession across her disc, and frequently enveloped her in complete obscurity; as the rain began to drop, and the dismal toll of the bell to reverberate from the old church tower, which even at so late an hour told to all the neighbouring villagers that

a child of earth was on the road to its last home, the silent and obscure mourning train set forth in its way to the church, through the gallery door, which communicated with the park.

They bore along with them the coffin that contained the mortal and dishonoured remains of one who had so early fallen, and who, had she died but two years before, would have been followed to the burial by half the country round, at the call of a fond father's loud and public grief. But now she was hurried to an obscure grave at night, almost unseen by men; and with a privacy that amounted almost to secrecy, as if in order that with her remains her memory might be blotted from the face of the earth.

Hannah, the faithful Hannah, even in this extremity, would not desert the child whom, in her last hours, Mrs. Fountaine had committed to her care. Hannah followed as chief mourner; a mourner indeed, wrapped in a large cloak, and leaning on the arm of her husband.

Four men of the household carried the coffin, as it is called in Devonshire, *under hand;* and three or four of the servants made up the rest of the train. All the mourning they wore consisted of the long black cloaks supplied by the undertaker, which would be thrown off at the close of the ceremony. Two of the grooms preceded the sad train with a couple of torches; and even these they feared the wind and rain would extinguish ere they reached the church.

All things had been previously prepared. The clergyman, Parson Nixon, and his old clerk and sexton, had done their part. Though the notice was brief, nothing had been neglected. The vault had been opened many hours before to let the fresh air pass freely through it, ere the living descended within its precincts to bring home their dead. The church was Gothic; unusually large for a village; and the vault of the Fountaine family so extensive that it was generally considered to have been part of the crypt of some more ancient church, on whose foundation the present edifice had been erected. A couple of candles, to enable Mr. Nixon to read the service, and a couple of torches near the entrance of the vault, formed all the lights in the church, which, in some parts, remained in deep obscurity or in absolute darkness, more especially towards the west end, where there were many ancient columns and high-backed pews.

As the bell continued to toll, the wind to howl, and the

rain to fall, Mr. Nixon, who had taken shelter in the vestry, after due notice from the sexton, came forth to meet the corpse. Whilst he walked before it up the aisle, and commenced the sacred service, the noblest and most impressive of all in our beautiful Liturgy, he thought he heard something stir at the lower end of the church. He took no notice of the circumstance, but proceeded in the sacred office, and the last rites were accomplished without interruption.

Hannah and Thomas, ever faithful to their affections and their trust, saw the coffin of the unhappy and misguided Elizabeth placed beside that of her mother. Hannah, when all was done, paused a moment to look upon both, and with a reverential feeling touched the decaying velvet and the tarnished silver breast-plate on the coffin of the late Mrs. Fountaine. She drew a deep sigh, wiped away the tears that almost blinded her eyes, and, giving her hand to Thomas, suffered him once more to lead her up the steps of the vault into the body of the church. She was too much overcome to pause there, and, after curtseying to Mr. Nixon, begged Thomas to hasten back with her to the Hall, for she could hardly support herself. Thomas and Hannah therefore were the first to leave the vestry, whither the mourning train had for a few minutes retired after the ceremony.

In crossing the aisle towards the west entrance, by the light of one of the torches still burning in the church, Hannah saw a tall figure, muffled in a cloak, issue from behind one of the columns, evidently endeavouring to shun observation and about to retreat. Hannah, in consequence of having so unexpectedly left the vestry before the other mourners, had advanced so close to the column that it was not possible she could do other than cross the path of the individual, whoever he might be. He therefore at once dashed past her, and left the church with the utmost precipitation.

"Good God!" exclaimed Hannah, pressing hard her hand on the arm of Thomas—"that is Mr. Fountaine!"

CHAPTER XI.

Poor wretch,
That, for thy mother's fault, art thus exposed
To loss, and what may follow! Weep I cannot,
But my heart bleeds.

SHAKSPERE.

ON the day that succeeded the funeral, I returned to my own home, taking with me the poor orphan babe. My good mother naturally felt desirous to have the little one baptized; but here she was in a sad dilemma. She did not think she ought to give a name to the infant without the orders of Mr. Fountaine, and those she dared not seek; as, after the night of the funeral, he maintained a determined silence about his deceased daughter, and never, even by the most distant allusion, hinted at the subject which it was evident had made so deep an impression on his feelings. He never inquired for the child, never expressed any interest in its fate.

Hannah, who always entertained a lingering hope that possibly the day might come when it would be otherwise, did not like to irritate him, or to give rise to any feelings of disgust towards the poor child, by teasing him about her. She knew well the character of Mr. Fountaine, that, with all his obstinacy and his arbitrary will (the consequence of the injudicious manner in which he had been brought up and indulged in youth), there was a great deal in his nature truly noble; that he was capable of a generous impulse, and not totally deaf to reason or persuasion, where neither his pride nor his passions interfered in any hostile manner in regard to the individual who endeavoured to influence him. By now, therefore, submitting implicitly to his will in an affair in which his prejudices were so deeply concerned, she hoped something from the future, when time and his own better feelings should begin to operate. She thought then it would be best, as long as the child continued well, to delay the christening. If, however, the child should be seriously ill, then Hannah resolved to have the ceremony of baptism performed, at all events. Such were her views on the subject.

Thomas had his own; but of a far more worldly kind. He had lived at the Hall, he said, ever since he was a boy; he had been present at the christening of Miss Martha and

Miss Amy, and both those events were celebrated with much state. And, though Mr. Fountaine might be angry now and rather strange about the poor child, yet Thomas felt sure the day would come when he would have his grandchild christened in the old way; that all the household would walk to church, and all the first sporting squires and their wives would stand godfathers and godmothers, and that all the tenantry would be feasted on the lawn, and most likely some of them would go home half-tipsy with the cider and the punch and the merry-making.

Hannah's expectations about the christening took no such flight as this; but she hoped much if the ceremony were delayed, and the poor babe, not yet a Christian, continued to be nursed by me. As soon as she was weaned and began to run alone, Hannah, who was never happy when the child was not with her, would have her back again to live at the Hall; and as Mr. Fountaine, she said, had given up his grand-daughter to her, in a great measure to do what she pleased with her, she determined to educate her after her own way, and, as far as she could, in accordance with those wishes Mrs. Fountaine had expressed for her children. But this was a matter for future consideration; at present, the great object was to keep her out of her grandfather's sight. In this there was no great difficulty; for age growing upon him, as well as the gout, he much lessened, if he did not altogether relinquish, his field-sports, and almost confined himself to the use of two or three apartments, his bed-room, the oak parlour, and his closet, where he settled his accounts with his attorney and his steward. All the rest of his very large, old, and rambling house, Hannah had entirely under her command to do what she pleased with it; there was no one to contradict her.

From the very day, therefore, that the child returned to what Hannah considered her rightful home, she selected two very nice rooms near her own, and these she destined for her charge; they were prettily situated towards the garden-front of the house, and commanded a view of the park and the old church, in which lay the remains of her mother and many of the race of Fountaine. Hannah appointed a respectable young woman to attend upon the little girl; and, between herself and the maid, Mr. Fountaine was so watched, that they contrived to give the child the air

when he was in doors, and to keep her in when he was about the park and grounds.

Five years passed away without any particular occurrence; yet neither the existence of the child nor its residence at the Hall were matters unknown to the most intimate friends of its master, who were now reduced to a very small circle. I have before noticed how gradually his field-sports declined, and in them the mirth and meetings he had been accustomed to afford to his more boisterous companions. Though Mr. Fountaine's old habits and manners more or less still clung to him, yet they were very much softened and subdued in all their harsher features. Still he never mentioned his daughters; and, though he would now and then, on rare occasions, mount his favourite old hunter, and go after the hounds, yet he followed the sport without spirit; never brought home the brush nor a train of hallooing men and yelping dogs at his heels, when the hunt was over, as he had been wont to do; and, if he sometimes took his gun, he would saunter along with it, and be so absent that, although the dogs did their duty, and put up a covey of birds, he frequently fired when it was too late.

As to visiting, he had never accepted an invitation since his youngest daughter ran away from his house, so that at last people left off inviting him. His intimates were the apothecary, Mr. Lavington, a worthy and a sensible man, and Lawyer Sheriff, who neither wanted shrewdness nor clients, nor an honest fame, but was much wanting in those arts of delay and tricks of the law, by which so many of its professors make long causes for their clients and long bills for themselves; so that it was quite true what Mr. Fountaine used to say of him, that Lawyer Sheriff's reputation was much greater than his fortune. Nevertheless, he was a hale, happy, contented man, with a family of children, who all did well in life, and by no unfair means.

Old Parson Nixon was, too, on very friendly terms at the Hall, and would come now and then and take a hit at backgammon with its master. An old fox-hunter, who had broken his leg by a fall from a horse on leaping a gate, and could never sit him more, but who could still enjoy a bowl of punch, used generally to come once or twice a week to see Mr. Fountaine. And Squire Dickons, who was not of an unkind heart, and always blamed himself for having been so ready to suspect the old gentleman, felt truly sorry for his

misfortunes. He told Hannah how concerned he was to see his neighbour so cut up after the sad business of his youngest daughter, and that he felt himself bound to do all he could to cheer him up. For this purpose he would call in a friendly way, or take a snack of dinner or supper, as he called it, with Mr. Fountaine, and bring him the news of the day; how the Pretender got on (for this happened at the time the country was so much disturbed by the Jacobites), to whom he knew Mr. Fountaine was well disposed in his heart; or whose horse had won the cup at the Haldon Hill races, and any interesting anecdotes which occurred to him about the hounds in his own pack.

These were the few friends who now gathered around the Squire, to comfort the old man and the bereaved father by his own hearthstone. But, though their efforts were made with all sincerity, and according to the best judgment of each, it would not do; Mr. Fountaine still remained a broken-hearted man, and suffered the more severely because he suffered in silence. In vain did the doctor advise him to try the benefit of change of air and society, with a tonic preparation of his own, excellent in any affections that had a tendency to megrims or vapours.

Mr. Fountaine refused medicine, or to leave his own home. Parson Nixon twice or thrice really did comfort him, by talking him to sleep with a discourse on the duty of submission, in which all the distressed and aggrieved fathers of old, from Isaac lamenting the disobedience of Esau in his choice of a wife, and Jacob regretting the loss of Joseph, and Eli the wickedness of his sons, down to David deploring the death of his child, were made to pass in review.

Squire Dickons had a less learned, but not a less sincere, method of trying his hand at comforting; and, as it proceeded from genuine kind feeling in his own breast, it touched the true chord in that of his friend. One evening the Squire came in, bringing with him a beautiful little dog of the spaniel breed, and told Mr. Fountaine, who admired the animal, it was much at his service.

Mr. Fountaine, like a true sportsman, inquired after the parentage of the spaniel.

"Ay, sir," replied Squire Dickons, "that, I am afraid, is a sore subject to touch upon for us both, and we won't name names; there's no good in that. But this pretty animal is a pup of the brown and white spaniel bitch that was given

to me, five or six years agon, by one whose picture once hung there;" he pointed to the vacant panel as he spoke.

Mr. Fountaine winced, but for once the tenderer mood prevailed; he turned aside as if to avoid observation, and, as he did so, wiped his eyes.

"Ay, sir," said Squire Dickons, "I will say no more than this: I felt obliged by the gift of the spaniel, the mother of this pup, and a vacant panel ought not to make a vacant memory in return for a kindness, and—and—" continued Squire Dickons, trying to hammer out something, yet not exactly knowing how to hit it—"and I thought as when I come to the Hall sometimes to have a chat with Mrs. Hannah, for the sake of old times, I see with her a sweet pretty lamb, with blue eyes and a curly poll, scarce five years old, playing about without a suitable companion, I did think this puppy would do very well for such, and so I brought it here. Now, as the mother of the puppy originally belonged to (Mr. Fountaine looked very grave) I won't say who, it seemed to me that there would be a sort of natural connection—a companionship that would very kindly spring up between the little girl and the little dog, and they would be very good friends the one to the other."

Squire Dickons stopped short, absolutely astonished at his own audacity, and most self-satisfied with its results, when he found that Mr. Fountaine bore this, the first direct allusion that had ever been made to his granddaughter since she had lived under his roof, with patience; for he neither quarrelled with him, nor turned him out of door for his impertinence. Indeed, the old gentleman took it in very good part, only saying, "You may leave the puppy, squire, at the Hall, and I dare say Hannah will know what to do with it."

Soon after Squire Dickons took his leave, whistled to the dog to follow him out of the oak parlour, and speedily found his way to the snuggery of the housekeeper.

"Mrs. Hannah," he said, rubbing his hands as he entered, and his eyes twinkling with pleasure, "we go on charmingly; he lets the puppy stay for the little child; though I as good as named her mother, and told him the old spaniel bitch, whose pup it is, had been given me by Miss Elizabeth. What do you think of that, Hannah?" asked Squire Dickons in an exulting tone, again rubbing his hands with the heartfelt delight the doing of a good-natured act never fails to bring with it.

"What do I think, Squire?" said Hannah. "Why, that you are a most kind-hearted gentleman, to introduce the mention of the poor child to Mr. Fountaine; a thing that not even I, who have lived with him so long, dare to do. And yet it is such a pity that he should have so sweet a creature living under his roof, and not know the comfort of her. Indeed, I am much obliged to you, and so will Mr. Fountaine be by-and-by, if he can but be induced to see her and to own her."

"That he shall," said Squire Dickons, "that he shall; the ice is broken, and that's a great thing, you know, Mrs. Hannah; and he knows she is here, and is to have my spaniel's puppy. The next thing we have to do will be to slide the child, as it were, into his notice. Now, to my thinking, Mrs. Hannah, the child herself could do that part of the business much better than either of us."

"But, if my master fancied that I plotted to let her do so, he would call it plotting against his will, and maybe would take some stern measures to dismiss me and the innocent creature from his sight for ever. O, Squire! you do not know Mr. Fountaine so well as I do."

"O, yes, I do; I know his ways; winces a good deal at what he don't very well like; but, after a little coaxing and managing, give him his head and he will go free enough. Now, I will tell you what must be done: you must have no hand in the business; you must be able to swear you had nothing to do in it—and let it be all the child's own doing; he won't hurt her; he can't eat her up, if he sees her. Why, bless you, she will be the sweetest child that ever he looked upon; and nobody in the shape of man could look upon her without loving her. Where is she? send her in to me. I want to see the dear little puppet. I've got some gingerbread nuts, as well as the puppy, for her. Let me see her; and, young as she is, I'll put her up to something; for she's a sensible little thing, as cunning as she is sweet. All you have to do, Hannah, is not to keep her up so close as you used to do, when her grandfather is in doors; but let her ramble about; I will warrant me she will, one of these days, find her way to play about in the Hall, or elsewhere: but let me see her."

A child like a cherub came in, and without the least fear went directly up to Squire Dickons, who had always been good-natured to her, and of whom she was very fond. He

took her up in his arms, gave her a toss or two, made her laugh with glee, and then seated her on his knees, as he passed his hand over her beautiful light brown locks, and said they put him in mind of his favourite spaniel's back, being almost as curly. He next rummaged in his pockets, and produced the gingerbread, which he put into the little fat and dimpled fingers, which soon found the way to her pretty rose-bud mouth.

"My dear," said Squire Dickons, in a coaxing tone, after she had got through her nut—"my dear, don't you like nice things?"

"Yes," replied the child; "I like gingerbread."

"But I am not always here to give it to you, my dear," said the Squire; "and there are many other things quite as good as gingerbread. Don't you see Mrs. Hannah very often taking out of her closet of a morning honey and marmalade, and such nice sweets, to send them in with the tea-things on a tray, that John, the butler, takes away with him?"

"Yes; John goes there with it," said the child, pointing to the door that led into the hall.

"Ay, my dear," said Squire Dickons; "but John doesn't stop there with it; he takes it to an old gentleman who lives in the rooms further off than the hall; and if, one of these days," continued the Squire, in a lower tone, and looking comically confidential, as he half whispered in the child's ear, as though he told her a secret, "you watched to see where John took the tray and the good things, and followed him, I dare say the old gentleman would give you some of them."

"I should be afraid," said the child.

"O, no!" replied the Squire; "he is the most good-natured old gentleman in all the world."

"What! as good-natured as you?" said the little girl.

"O, yes, and would be very fond of you. He let me bring you the pretty puppy that Hannah has for you; but now, my dear, I must take leave, and go home."

So saying, Squire Dickons once more kissed the downy cheek of his pretty pet, set her on her feet, and soon after bade adieu to her and the friendly housekeeper.

The little girl, into whose mind the Squire had infused most pleasing hopes of honey and marmalade, annexed to the idea of a visit to the unseen but good-natured old gentleman who lived in the oak parlour, did not forget the

instructions she had received as to how she was to obtain them; but, from the sort of whispering and mystery with which the Squire had conveyed his intelligence, she was afraid to tell all about it to Hannah, who had so often cautioned her never to go beyond the hall, but pondered over these things in her little heart. At length, one morning, the sight of the butler, carrying along the tray with a more than ordinary portion of good things upon it, seemed to her an irresistible opportunity. She followed the man's steps, but slowly, for fear of detection; for, as he was returning along the gallery, after having left the tray in the oak parlour, she slipped her little self behind a large screen to avoid observation.

When the coast was clear she crept out and looked about her, and now saw that John had left the parlour door ajar. She walked very softly along the gallery, and at length ventured to peep her little head into the parlour. She saw within a white-haired old gentleman over his breakfast, engaged, at that very moment, in spreading on a slice of bread some of the delicious marmalade, the object of her hopes. Yet, still afraid of what she was doing, she as quickly drew back. Soon after, she just peeped in with one eye, and then as speedily drew back again.

Mr. Fountaine, though at a distance, was seated opposite the door opening from the gallery. It had moved slightly, and attracted his notice, but who or what it might be that caused the movement he could not tell, for it was gone again in a moment. But the door stirred a second time, and now, thinking it must be one of the dogs escaped from the kennel, he rose up with the intent to shut out the intruder. When he got close to the door he perceived a fair infant face, with a blue eye and a curly poll, that made him start with surprise; but the next moment the child, afraid of what she had done, ran away and concealed herself behind the screen in the gallery.

Mr. Fountaine stood near the still half-open door, expecting to see again those blue eyes and that little curly poll which had but now so startled him. I will not pretend to say with what feelings he expected their return. The child, knowing that she was detected in her visit to the forbidden part of the house, began to be alarmed; but, looking behind her, and not seeing Hannah, she ventured once more to peep with both eyes into the room, when, observing a smile on the face

of the old gentleman, she ventured on further, and put forward her little feet, till she was fairly within, though still close to the door. She looked up innocently, half-pleased and half-afraid of what she had done, and blushed all over her sweet face.

By this time Hannah had missed the child, and, fearing which way she had gone, flew after her, as softly as she could, in the hope to get her back again before she ventured too far. But she came in sight only just in time to see the little creature put in both her feet, and stand erect before her grandfather, though still holding the door in her hand. Hannah knew that her interference would be now too late; and, thinking it might be God's will that the innocent being who had neither father nor mother to take care of her should find a parent who would love and protect her in a grandfather, she determined she would not too hastily step in to mar so good an opportunity. She remained, therefore, without, and stood trembling for the event, scarcely knowing what to hope or what to fear, yet having an undefined conviction on her mind that this was the crisis of the orphan's future destiny.

Through the half-open door Hannah could see the countenance of Mr. Fountaine, reflected in a looking-glass that hung on the side opposite to where he stood. She could read it in the expression of strong emotion, whilst his eyes were fixed on the child's face, as he seemed to be scrutinizing every feature, for he judged true enough whose child she was. At length, he said to her in a mild tone, "Well, my dear, and who sent you here this morning?"

"Nobody sent me," she replied; "I come of my own self."

"You come of your own self," said Mr. Fountaine; "and what do you want here?"

The child hung down her head, afraid of making a confession about the good things in the tea-tray; but answered, blushing if possible more deeply than before, "I should like to play in dis pretty place." As she lisped these words, she advanced a few steps further.

For a minute or two there was silence; Mr. Fountaine had moved his position, and Hannah could no longer see his countenance reflected in the glass. Not knowing what this silence might augur for the child, and fearing her master might blame her for a neglect of his orders, she thought she had better go in, as if in a fright, after the little one who had

strayed beyond bounds. Hannah was in reality too much frightened to need act a part; and she began asking pardon with great earnestness, and prepared to take away the little intruder, when Mr. Fountaine cut her very short, and said, in a manner which showed that, though serious and even suffering from some strong but suppressed feelings, he was not displeased, "Hannah, that child has not in the least the look of the viper breed."

"No, sir," said Hannah, and scarcely knowing what she said, so much was she overcome with joy to think how Mr. Fountaine received this breach of his commands, she added, in a confused manner, "This child is even more handsome than——" Hannah stopped short, and finished her sentence by saying, "I think, sir, she is like Miss Martha."

"No," said Mr. Fountaine, "she is more like my own wife than was either of her daughters—though Martha had her eyes. But this child is the image of her." He snatched the infant up as he spoke, held her out at arm's length, to show her to Hannah, as he stood before Mrs. Fountaine's portrait, and looked first at the one and then at the other, as if making a comparison between them.

"I have often fancied, sir," said Hannah, "that she was like some one of the family; but, till you pointed it out I never thought how like she was the picture of my beloved mistress."

"And yet, Hannah," replied Mr. Fountaine, "you have done so much for those who were very dear to her, and even for this little one, that I should have thought you would like to look upon her picture sometimes. If a picture could speak, she would thank you, however ungratefully the others requited both your care and mine, Hannah."

"She was ever a dear good lady," said Hannah, "and kind to my child, sir; how could I do less for her?"

"Ay, she was kind and good, as you say, Hannah;" and he added, with a smile such as she had not seen in his face for years, "you know, Hannah, she worked with her own hands your child's christening-cap. You see, Hannah, the old man doesn't forget old times."

"No, sir," replied the housekeeper, "no, I never can forget my dear lady there——"

Mr. Fountaine fixed his eyes once more intently on his wife's portrait. It was evident to Hannah that his strong recollection of her had at this moment greatly softened his feelings. "I am glad," he continued, after a pause, "that

the did not live to see such ingratitude as I have seen." The tears rushed to his eyes, and he was again silent.

Hannah told me she thought at the moment that, had Mrs. Fountaine lived, in all probability everything would have been very different, as the young ladies would certainly have received from their mother a very different education; but she did not say so.

Mr. Fountaine now turned again to the child, and once more took her in his arms. She looked up at him half afraid, not knowing what to make of his serious countenance and the tears that had started into his eyes, and she said with the sweetest voice, as she gazed with fear and wonder in his face—"Don't cry."

He put down the child hastily and turned towards Hannah, with a calm countenance, and with something of his former short manner asked what the child was called. Hannah thought to herself, he fears I may answer "Elizabeth"; but she soon relieved him by saying, "Sir, I have called her Miss Betsy, for I knew not what to do about taking upon me to name her."

"Has she been christened in church then?" inquired Mr. Fountaine.

"No, sir," replied Hannah: "I did not think it right, without your ——"

"Have it done then," said Mr. Fountaine, interrupting her, "by the names of Betsy Fountaine. Let it be done as privately as possible; you the godmother; any godfather you please—no fuss; and no delay. Remember, Betsy Fountaine; and remember also that no other names be registered; that is, that no third name be registered."

"But, sir," said Hannah, who saw at once by such a registry Mr. Fountaine would brand his grand-daughter with illegitimacy, "but, sir, her mother was married; she had on her hand the wedding-ring when this dear child was born, and her father, Captain Quirk ——"

"Accursed be the name!" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine, in a voice that made Hannah start, and absolutely frightened the poor child. "How dare you repeat that name in my presence? Hannah, you are somewhat privileged; but do not you go too far. Had any one but yourself named a name before me that ruined in soul and body the child I loved more than life, or all that life can give, that has covered the remnant of my days with misery, and driven me almost to madness—had any one but you, Hannah, done this, be it

whosoever it might, he should never more have seen my face, or felt my bounty."

Hannah would have begged pardon, but Mr. Fountaine waved his hand and bade her be silent, assuring her he had pardoned her. "Hear me, Hannah," he continued; "don't mistake me—don't think, because you see me weak and foolish sometimes, that I am changed. I can't help getting an old man, nor can I help the infirmities that old age will bring along with it; we are twice children in many points, especially in our weaknesses. But, in some things, Hannah, I tell you, I can never change whilst a drop of blood warms my heart, or whilst memory enough remains to me to know who I am and what I am. I never will forget the injuries heaped upon my head. I would remember them whilst dropping into the very grave, which will bury them. Even now I would resent them, but that the villain who brought the greatest of them all upon me is gone to his account; and if we must meet beyond the grave, as I believe we shall, Hannah, the book will not, I hope, be closed in which is written the debt of injury brought on me. Hannah, would you wish me to love that child and to be as a father to it?"

"O, sir!" said Hannah, raising her hands, as the tears streamed down her face, "how can you ask such a question! I would give my life to secure your love and care of her."

"Well, then," replied Mr. Fountaine, "mark me—once and for ever I tell you that child shall never bear the name of the father; and, unless you would make me hate the sight of her, never again remind me whose blood she has in her veins; and now no more of this—let me finish my breakfast. I saw this little curly poll eyeing the marmalade just now. Give her to me on my knee; I have something to say to her. I used once to know how to please such little ones."

And, so saying, Mr. Fountaine took his grandchild on his lap, kissed and made friends with her, and bade her henceforth call him grandpapa; and all this he did with as much good-humoured ease as if nothing extraordinary had happened, as if no deep passions had so recently been called up in his own bosom; so powerful was the self-command of this singular man, when he had once subdued those emotions which surprised him into a momentary weakness. But he was of a very strong character; whether for generosity or resentment, for love or hatred, he was still Mr. Fountaine. He bade Hannah wipe her eyes and not be foolish, and

begged her to make some tea for him and his little lady, for whom he proceeded with his own hands to spread the orange marmalade.

The breakfast over, Hannah was preparing to lead away little Betsy, lest she should be troublesome to her grandpapa, when the spaniel puppy walked in and seated himself at Mr. Fountaine's feet before the fire. The old gentleman caressed the dog; the sight of it seemed to bring a train of not unpleasing thoughts to his mind, for he called Hannah back as she was retreating, and said—"Hannah, let that good-natured fellow, Squire Dickons, be godfather to little Betsy Fountaine: and now leave me. Take the puppy with you; he is the child's companion."

Hannah curtseyed and obeyed: she was happy indeed at what had passed. Great, however, was the disappointment of Thomas when he found there was to be no grand christening. He set off, however, immediately to prepare Parson Nixon for the private one ordered, and to let Squire Dickons know what office he was appointed to fulfil. Hannah was in the midst of her thankful joy for the restoration of Betsy Fountaine to the favour of her grandfather, when the child suddenly addressed her.

"Do you know, Hannah, I went to see grandpapa, all alone by myself. I went to him and into the room by the gallery door."

"By the gallery door!" exclaimed Hannah, her heart sickening within her at the recollection that it was by that very door the unhappy mother of the innocent child who now spoke had forced herself on Mr. Fountaine the evening of her melnacholy return home, to receive a father's curse, and to die under his roof. A feeling of superstitious dread stole over Hannah, as this recollection crossed her mind, and almost spoiled the joy of the morning.

CHAPTER XII.

Think not, the good,
The gentle deeds of mercy thou hast done,
Shall die, forgotten all: the poor, the prisoner,
The fatherless, the friendless, and the widow,
Who daily own the bounty of thy hand,
Shall cry to Heav'n, and pull a blessing on thee.
ROWE.

At christenings well could act his part,
And had the service all by heart.
SWIFT.

SQUIRE DICKONS, who rejoiced to see how well his scheme for the benefit of the poor child had worked, accepted with great glee the office of godfather, and prepared his gift of silver spoons on the occasion with the utmost munificence: it was the more marked in him, as, generally speaking, he was saving with his money. But he felt he had done a really good action, and that opened his heart and his hand too.

Hannah stood godmother, as directed, dressed in a handsome brocaded silk, which the late Mrs. Fountaine had given her to wear at her wedding, and which, ever since, the good housekeeper had kept laid up in bunches of lavender in the wardrobe, to be worn only on very great occasions. She now sighed as she put it on, remembering the last time it was worn, on the day of the christening of one of Mr. Fountaine's children: then there was rejoicing and merry-making; now all was as solemn and as private as possible. Thomas thought no good could come of such poor doings, so contrary to all the hearty and open-handed customs of the family.

Parson Nixon, notwithstanding his discourses on submission and the awe he felt for his patron, by no means approved the entry he had ordered should be made in the register of the baptism of his grand-daughter. He said to Squire Dickons, after the ceremony was over, that his conscience told him he might go too far in yielding compliance to Mr. Fountaine's arbitrary temper: that he could not but remember how prophets and ministers of old had stood up and resisted even kings to their faces, as in the matter of Moses and Pharaoh, when the Egyptian would not let the people of Israel go; of Balaam and Balak, when the prophet insisted

on blessing the chosen of God, instead of cursing them, as required by his prince and patron; and as in the matter of Nathan, who told King David boldly to his face he had sinned. Now, the instruction he drew from all this was, that he ought to consider whether he should not, though contrary to orders, add the name of Quirk to the registry of Betsy Fountaine.

"Sir," said Squire Dickons, "I don't pretend to argue with you about the parties you have named, who resisted their betters, kings or otherwise; for you are a parson, Mr. Nixon, and learned in all those matters; and that's your business and not mine. But I know Mr. Fountaine, and if he is disobeyed he is like enough to turn this poor lamb out of his house, and not to leave her sixpence hereafter. Why, sir, begging your pardon for saying so, as you are a parson, Mr. Fountaine hates a Quirk as he hates the devil himself, I believe, and would as soon benefit the one as the other. And now tell me, parson, how your conscience will sit upon you, if, by putting your obstinacy against Squire Fountaine's, you become the means of his cutting off this poor child with a shilling, and of throwing her upon me, who, as her godfather, would feel obliged to take her in, if he did so: and I a widower man, with a long family of three children of my own to provide for: I should like to see how you will answer that."

"My duty, Squire Dickons, my duty, as a divine, must be considered, sir, before Mr. Fountaine's pleasure; though in all reasonable matters I would questionless study to oblige a man who is my patron."

"Well, then, oblige him now," said Squire Dickons, "for I tell you this is a reasonable matter. Why, Parson Nixon, there is no proof in the world that when Miss Elizabeth ran away with that son of a sharper, Captain Quirk, he ever married her."

"Squire," said Hannah, who was present at this debate in the vestry, after the christening of the child, "excuse my interfering, but Miss Elizabeth was really married. I saw the wedding-ring on her finger with my own eyes when she came home so miserably, and this poor child was born, and she called the Captain, then dead, her husband."

"That's no proof at all; anybody may put on a gold ring, and say they are married, to keep up appearances. I tell you, the whole country had doubts about it, and nobody ever heard

at what church they were married, or who was present; and old Quirk encouraged these reports, and never once contradicted them."

"He was a wicked man, sir," said Hannah, "and thought that the discredit that fell on Miss Elizabeth, the favourite daughter, would mortify Mr. Fountaine; and so he rather countenanced than contradicted the tongue of slander."

"But, I tell you, there is no proof to be found that she was ever married; and you know Mr. Fountaine's orders: he will not have them questioned."

"But such an entry will stamp the child with illegitimacy," said Mr. Nixon.

"Never you mind that," said Squire Dickons. "Illegitimacy! a fiddlestick's end! I wonder whether her legitimacy will procure her bread, if her grandfather cuts her out of his will. And after all, I tell you again, whatever may be the fact, there is no proof of a marriage in this case."

"Well, Squire," said Parson Nixon, "if there is really no proof, that is another thing; my conscience would compel me to comply with a proof, but I do not see it need trouble me to suppose one. And so, sir, we will register the little girl under the names of Betsy Fountaine, daughter of Elizabeth Fountaine, spinster."

And so was the child registered, and thus did her grandfather at once stamp her with illegitimacy. This strange transaction soon became the talk of the whole neighbourhood, and many blamed Mr. Fountaine; but he remained in total ignorance of all this gossip, for his arbitrary temper was too well known to make any one risk offending him by telling him what was said on the occasion.

I pass by many years of the child's life. I have already said that my mother felt convinced all the evils which had befallen Mr. Fountaine's daughters arose from the want of a proper education.

She determined that, as little Betsy was given up to her care, she should have a very different education. The words of Solomon, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," were always in her mind, and she resolved to begin with her charge betimes. For this purpose she never scrupled to restrain her when she thought it would be for her benefit; and punished her when, now and then, in imitation of her grandfather's humour, she would give a stamp with her little foot, or make an effort to

obtain what she wanted by any exertion of an arbitrary will. Even Squire Dickons, who grew more and more fond of his godchild, seeing how well Hannah managed her, gave his regular supply of gingerbread into the custody of the housekeeper, with an intimation that she was henceforth to dispense it as a reward for good conduct.

To his present of the spoons, Squire Dickons added a horn-book; and, now and then, when he would call in upon Hannah, though the worthy Squire was not very literary, yet, after patting the heads of his curly-polled god-daughter and her curly-backed spaniel, he would take her on his knee and examine her in her progress. And often would he declare that to him it was wonderful to think how soon she had learned to read. For his own part, it had cost him more time when a boy, and his master more birch, than he cared to tell of, before it could be whipped into him to know great A from little b. But as for his sweet little god-daughter, she was a most wonderful child. He approved Hannah's manner of training, to begin early. A colt or a pointer could scarcely be broken in too soon. He liked also Hannah's ideas about making her religious, and thought it very sweet and pretty to see the dear little thing, with her innocent face, kneeling down at the housekeeper's feet, and saying her prayers, and asking God to be a father to her who had none. Hannah, one of these days, should see what he thought of all this, and how he would help the good work for the child.

Accordingly, the next time Squire Dickons found his way to the housekeeper's room, he came in smiling, and lugging a great book under his arm, very handsomely bound, bearing upon its back, in letters of gold, the words, "THE HOLY BIBLE." The Squire laid it down upon the table, shook Hannah by the hand, took little Betsy on his knee, drove away the spaniel that wanted to claim a place on the other, and proceeded to open the book.

First, he showed to little Betsy a woodcut ornamented letter, at the beginning of the first chapter of Genesis, representing, neither in the most graceful style of design nor in the most exact drawing, Adam and Eve, standing, the one on the right and the other on the left of a large tree, hung with apples, round which was twisted a serpent, nearly as large as the tree itself, whispering into the ear of Eve. A lion with a very comical face, and what was intended for a lamb, were seen reposing in the background very lovingly together.

Squire Dickons had so much of theology as to be able to expound the meaning of the picture to little Betsy.

He next turned over to the fly-leaf of the book, in which, in his very best hand and spelling (having looked out the words very carefully in the dictionary before he wrote them down) appeared the following autograph inscription :—

"BETSY FOUNTAINE, HER BOOKE;
The Gift of her Affectionate Godfather,
THOMAS RIDEABOUT DICKONS, ESQUIRE,
Of Beagle Hall,
One of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Devon;
This 21st day of July, in the year of our Lord 1750."

"There, my dear," said Squire Dickons, giving little Betsy a kiss, "that is your own book. Mind what Hannah says, and what that book will teach you, and may God bless you to live to be a good woman! And now, I hope, I have done my duty by you as a godfather, having given the best instructions that I can for you. But as for the sermons in the vulgar tongue, as I can't preach, you must look to Parson Nixon for them. But mind that book, and all, I dare say, will go well with you."

Betsy did mind what it taught her; and though Hannah could neither teach her French, nor how to play on the harpsichord (though she managed to obtain for her some instruction in both, by a master who came into the neighbourhood), yet, under her care, the child gained a good education, and many lessons on the duties of obedience and self-control. Of what is called the world, Hannah could not teach her much, for she knew very little about it herself. All the world of her life had been confined to the precincts of Fountaine Hall, where she had indeed acquired, by seeing the faults and miseries of its master and his family, no small insight into the passions and prejudices of strong and ungoverned character. The experience she had gained from this source she now endeavoured to employ for the benefit of her young charge.

From the time Mr. Fountaine consented to acknowledge Betsy as his grand-daughter, she became, in a great measure, the sole object for which he lived. When Hannah could spare her from her lessons, she was almost always with him. In her infancy, she was his plaything; in her youth, his

companion. When a little creature, not much higher than his knee, he would take her by the hand, and lead her about with him in the park or the gardens, as she prattled by his side; and sometimes she would take part of her breakfast with her, and endeavour to entice the deer to come and eat it out of her hand, and her grandfather gave her a sunny plot of ground, carefully tended and cultivated, in which she worked herself, and which was called Betsy's garden.

CHAPTER XIII.

Who hath not proved how feebly words essay
To fix one spark of beauty's heavenly ray?
Who doth not feel, until his failing sight
Faints into dimness with its own delight,
His changing cheek, his sinking heart confess
The might, the majesty, of loveliness?

BYRON'S *Bride of Abydos*.

BETSY FOUNTAINE was in her sixteenth year when I resume my account of her. She was the loveliest young creature that ever I beheld—much handsomer than had been any of Mr. Fountaine's daughters; and though like her mother, more beautiful and far more engaging, for she was not a spoilt child.

Betsy was rather tall, and very graceful; of a fair skin, with that extreme delicacy of complexion which showed all the blue veins in her forehead; and, when animated by exercise or feeling, presented a roseate blush upon her cheek that was exquisite as the bloom upon the maiden-blush rose. Her eyes were large, full, and blue; lively, yet capable of great softness; and there was in them, at times, when her affections were touched, a deep expression of tenderness the most charming. Her mouth, which always indicates the temper, was beautiful; of ineffable sweetness; and, when her lips parted, it was to show a set of teeth of the purest white. Her hair, of a warm light brown, hung in waving curls around her temples and about her head; it was rich and bright as gold.

Her disposition, though she had in it something of the Fountaine spirit, and not a little of the family pride, had been so well trained, that no wild weeds were suffered to

overtop the flowers; her faults were few; indeed, rather failings than faults; and her virtues many, whilst her manners were of the most attractive kind. She was sensible; quick in her perceptions; of the most animated manners; and, whilst perfectly modest and unaffected, a lively and engaging companion. She had a fondness for books; and was by no means deficient in what are called accomplishments. She played on the harpsichord well enough to accompany her own beautiful voice, and she could sing like an angel. She loved Hannah as a mother; whilst to her grandfather she was meek, affectionate, and dutiful. This sweet creature seemed as if destined to console him for all the disappointments he had met with in respect to his own daughters.

Yet, with all these perfections, and though the avowed favourite of her grandfather, whose ancient family, high station, and great wealth were well known, poor Betsy Fountaine, like her aunts and her mother before her, never had the advantage of being introduced into that class of superior society in which she was entitled to move. All this arose from the prejudices and the arbitrary will of Mr. Fountaine in having so cruelly stamped her with the brand of illegitimacy. Mr. Fountaine's daughters had borne but a poor character for prudence and decorum, and they had been shunned by the ladies of the highest order and breeding in the neighbourhood as unfit companions for their children. Miss Elizabeth's fair fame had suffered fatally by the shameful conduct of old Quirk, who knew well enough that his son had married her, but cared not what was said, or who might be injured, so long as he could spite Mr. Fountaine. No one had taken the matter up with spirit and contradicted those cruel reports of no marriage having taken place, and it was now publicly said that Mr. Fountaine would never have had his grand-daughter's baptism entered in the register in the way in which it there stood unless he knew for a certainty that she was illegitimate; never, were it otherwise, would he have put such a brand on the reputation of his own deceased daughter. Some of the ill-natured added, "As the mother had been so would the daughter be. It was a pity she had not died also as soon as she was born, rather than live to be a disgrace to the family." I need not state any further reasons to show how it was that (except Squire Dickons' rustic daughters) Miss Betsy Fountaine had no female society; indeed, no society at all, saving the persons

I have before described, who were intimate with her grandfather.

In short, the gentry would not visit her—that is, the female part; for she was so beautiful, and was so much talked of for her various attractions, that many of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood were desirous to become acquainted with her, and would bow to her as she passed them in her rides, or stop and ask after her grandfather, trying by such means to bring about an acquaintance. But towards them all she showed the Fountaine spirit (nor could any one blame her for it), and repelled all such advances with rather a haughty air, as neither the wives nor the sisters of these gentlemen would notice her. Another thing, also, helped to keep up this most unfortunate prejudice; nobody knew (though Miss Martha had not been heard of for so many years) if Mr. Fountaine intended or not to make Miss Betsy his heir, and all said unless he did so her illegitimacy would leave her a beggar.

In this account of the slights and neglects with which the poor young lady was treated by the gentry I must except one family—which, however, lived too far off (for they resided at Kingsbridge) to be deemed neighbours. Their name was Maynard. The eldest son, a young man in holy orders, became curate to Parson Nixon, and, as that worthy divine became old and infirm, and the living was in the gift of Mr. Fountaine, it was thought the family in question had an eye to the future preferment of this youth, so it might not be altogether without a purpose they sought the acquaintance of Mr. Fountaine.

About this time old Parson Nixon took an additional curate—Mr. Wheatley, a relation of his own, who could not otherwise procure a title for holy orders. And now, having the assistance of two young men, Mr. Nixon committed the parish and its duties to their charge, and went to Bath, in the hope that the waters would relieve his rheumatic gout; and there for the present I must leave him.

CHAPTER XIV.

Oh, most adored! Oh, most regretted love!
Oh, joys that never must again be mine!
And thou, lost hope, farewell! vainly I rove,
For never shall I reach the land divine,
Nor ever shall thy beams celestial shine
Again upon my sad unheeded way!
Oh! let me here with life my woes resign,
Or in this gloomy den for ever stay,
And shun the scornful world, nor see detested day.
MRS. TIGHE'S *Psyche.*

THE worthy surgeon I mentioned in a former part of this story as being one of the few old friends who still continued favourites at the Hall after the great affliction of its master, came into the possession of a very handsome property on the death of a distant relative, and, as he was growing old, he determined to leave off fagging, yet not altogether to resign his practice. He at once, therefore, took out his diploma, and acted as a physician. His son, an amiable young man, of very considerable talents, who had been studying under one of the first surgeons in London, succeeded to his more general practice. Many wondered that a person of such very superior abilities, who, as his father said, had an ambitious wish to rise in his profession, should be content to settle down with so confined a practice as that of our neighbourhood.

But Hannah, who knew the young gentleman from his childhood, had her own thoughts on the subject. She had considerable penetration, and it was quite evident to her that young Mr. Edward Lavington admired Miss Betsy Fountaine; though, as he was a very modest man, he felt not only awed by the fear of her grandfather but of herself; for he entertained so high an opinion of her merit that he thought himself in no way deserving of her—at least, so it appeared to Hannah, by what she could draw from him in conversation.

He loved her so dearly that Hannah grew anxious on the subject, and closely watched the young people. She fancied she could detect certain marks of something like an understanding between them. She often surprised them walking alone in the garden, or in earnest conversation together; when, if she came on them unexpectedly, both would look confused.

She very closely questioned Betsy as to the state of her heart; well knowing how fatal had been an entanglement of the affections to her unhappy mother. Betsy kissed her, thanked her, acknowledged her kind intentions, but certainly did not reply with her usual frankness; for she rather evaded the questions put to her than gave any direct answer to them.

"I am sure, Miss Betsy," said Hannah, "that, if you and Mr. Edward Lavington like each other, you need not despair, though certainly he is not so high a match as Mr. Fountaine might have expected for his grand-daughter. Yet Mr. Lavington will have a very fair estate on his father's death, for he is an only child; and I would gladly try what I could do to bring round your grandfather, and your godfather also, to favour his suit. Yet, for that matter, I believe there would be no very great difficulty, for all the county talks of your grandfather's liking for Mr. Lavington, and thinks he would make no objection to a match between you. I can assure you he greatly regards him, and would, I dare say, have no dislike to see you change your state."

"But, my dear Hannah," said Betsy, laughing, and throwing her arms affectionately round her neck, "I do not want to change my state. I am much happier as I am; and why should you endeavour to persuade me? I desire to be no other than I am. As to Edward Lavington, I do most heartily rejoice to hear that he stands so highly in my grandfather's favour; but I see not why it should of necessity follow that he would wish to see me united to him. Hannah, all you have said is very tenderly meant; but it is a foolish subject, and so pray talk no more about it."

Hannah shook her head; she felt there was in all this something more than she could understand. It pained her exceedingly, because it was the first time she had ever seen anything in Miss Betsy to make her fancy she was other than the most artless and open-hearted of human beings. So it passed off. But soon a circumstance arose far more mysterious than even this to excite her curiosity and attention. The full particulars, however, did not become known to Hannah till some time after, when she related them to me, and I here give them from her statement.

One fine summer's afternoon Mr. Fountaine ordered the punch-bowl to be taken into the oak parlour, saying that he had invited Squire Dickons and young Mr. Edward Laving-

ton to come and share a bowl with him, and to talk over some matters of business. Hannah obeyed; and, after having seen all things carefully arranged, she was about to retire when Mr. Fountaine told her to come back. He had hitherto been pacing up and down the room with his hands behind his back, and looking very thoughtful.

"Hannah," he said, "I shall want you by-and-by; I have something on my mind I shall tell you of before I go to bed to-night; for you have lived with me so long, Hannah, and have been so faithful through all the weal and woe of my family, that I consider you as the very best friend I have in the world. And you are a sensible woman too, and show it in never thwarting me; so come in when the Squire and the young doctor are gone, and I shall have something to tell you worth the hearing."

The first of the expected friends who arrived was young Mr. Lavington; and Mr. Fountaine, who was never very patient, and whose mind was full of his subject, would wait no longer for the Squire; and, after some few words of civil salutation, thus began:

"You will presently find, Mr. Lavington, that I have a particular object in view in asking my grand-daughter's godfather, Squire Dickons, to meet you here this afternoon, and what that object is I shall not touch upon till he comes. He is late; ten minutes behind his time."

Young Mr. Lavington bowed, wondering what was next to follow. Mr. Fountaine motioned him to take a seat, filled the glasses from the punch-bowl, drank a health, and filled again; then leaned back in his chair, put his right hand into his bosom, crossed his left knee over the other, and remained silent for a minute or two, as if considering. At length he all at once broke this strange silence with somewhat of his old arbitrary tone and manner, though in one of his very best humours, by saying, "It is nonsense to be thinking how to mention it; you, young gentleman, may as well know my pleasure in the business at once."

"Sir!" said Mr. Lavington, really not understanding to what the old gentleman could possibly allude.

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine, repeating his friend's interjectional note of surprise, "there needs no wonder about the matter. I shall be very frank with you, and shall begin by letting you know that I am not a stranger to the state of

your feelings, and have made up my mind about you, as you shall presently hear; but first ——"

Young Lavington turned pale as death; he guessed the subject on which Mr. Fountaine was about to open, and his agitation and distress were almost overwhelming. He appeared to be taken so completely by surprise as to be incapable of any other answer than—"O, sir! Mr. Fountaine!" and there he stopped.

"No apologies, young gentleman," said Mr. Fountaine; "I am, as you may see by my manner, not at all displeased; and I am about to give you a very strong proof of my regard, and a proof also that I am an honest man, by beginning with telling you what few people like to speak or to hear, especially when it, in some measure, reflects upon themselves—the truth. But I know you to be a gentleman, and, moreover, I believe you to be my sincere friend."

Mr. Lavington bowed assent; and, though a little recovered from his first surprise, he still looked anxious and distressed.

Mr. Fountaine did not notice it. Indeed, he did not see it, for his eyes were at the moment fixed on a very favourite object—the portrait of Mrs. Fountaine, which hung before his sight. "Sir," he continued, "ever since I lost the original of that picture, I have been a most unhappy man; I am not apt to speak of my feelings to any one, but it is so. I have loved my children; I decided on what seemed to me the best for their happiness; I followed up those decisions resolutely, but in all three I have been disappointed. One child, more than all the rest, gave a blow to the fond heart of a father that nothing will cure, doctor; nothing but what cures all—the forgetfulness of death. And I do not know if I should feel sorry were it less slow with me."

He paused, and resumed, "I have, however, one thing left to love that is worthy of all the love and care I have ever bestowed on her, and that is my grandchild. Yes, Mr. Lavington, she is a comfort to me—the solace of my age. Ever since the day I first saw her peeping in with her blue eyes and her curly poll at that very door, I have been a happier man; and, shall I say it? a better man than I ever hoped to be again in this world. Mr. Lavington, I am getting old and feeble; I feel it daily. Age is creeping on me, and gout and decay. But I could not die happy did I not leave this dear child in good hands, so that she may never feel such

misery as was the fate of—her mother." (He started up from his chair, greatly agitated as he spoke the last words.) "I never name her mother. Judge how deep must be the anxiety that now induces me to do so to you. Oh, Mr. Lavington!" he continued, going up to him, and taking his hand with much warmth, "I know your feelings. I will give —I consent to give—this dear child to you. Take her, love her, guard her happiness, as I have done, and I shall die with more comfort than I have lived. With her you will receive the whole of my estate; for Martha has not been heard of for nearly twenty years, and must be dead. I shall give all that I possess on earth to Betsy Fountaine. Take, then, the heiress of the Fountaine family, and with her take my blessing on you both."

To describe the agitation, the embarrassment, the anxiety young Lavington seemed to labour under to express his thankfulness to Mr. Fountaine, whilst all his efforts were rendered ineffectual by the evident confusion of his mind, would be impossible.

Even the old gentleman was struck with it; and he said hastily, "Why, Mr. Edward, what does all this mean? You thank me, and talk of gratitude, and Heavens knows what, and yet seem to say nothing. You surely cannot doubt I mean to do what I propose? When I promise, sir, I never fail; you may know, therefore, I am sincere. Mr. Lavington, do you really understand me—that I intend to give you Betsy Fountaine, and with her the heirship of my estate?"

"O, sir!" said Mr. Lavington, "can I ever hope to find words of sufficient force to express to you my feelings at this moment?—my gratitude, thankfulness, my deep sense of such an honour, of my own demerits? And yet, sir, what will you think of me when I say that, from the force of circumstances over which I have no control, I must decline all your generosity, all this proffered favour! Believe me when I say this, for it is truth, that I feel, in declining to receive the hand of Miss Betsy Fountaine, I decline what is of more worth than all the world besides, a woman good, beautiful, of transcendent sweetness."

The old gentleman's face worked with agitation, as it usually did when the angry storm was collecting before it burst forth; but, in the midst of all his angry feelings, his utter astonishment, he could not but see there was something so painfully expressive of heartfelt misery in the pale

and blank countenance, the broken accents and distressed manner, of the young man, that Mr. Fountaine was as much struck with it as he was with the enexpected nature of his answer to so very generous a proposal. He checked himself, therefore, and said calmly—"Mr. Lavington, I am not accustomed to be trifled with. There is some unexplained mystery here; you would not act thus from caprice. Deal candidly with me, and tell me what it is."

Knowing, as Mr. Lavington did well, the arbitrary temper of Mr. Fountaine, and how ill he could bear the slightest opposition to his will, he was both surprised and touched by the manner in which he bore with him; for he felt that the anger which, before an explanation can be given, sinks into mildness and forbearance of all reproach, from a conviction that he who has excited it acts from principle, is the anger of a generous character. Mr. Lavington felt, therefore, something like a man who repays the confidence another places in his integrity by abusing it, when he replied, "O, sir, spare me! I beseech you, spare me! I can give no explanation—I am so unhappily placed, that I cannot do justice to myself, or to my own feelings, without a violation of what is right; I am distressed indeed."

"And I am in error," said Mr. Fountaine; "I thought, by all I have heard, that you knew the value of my granddaughter; that you were fond of her; and that only your doubt of what I should say to you on the subject caused your fear; but I now see my error."

"Mr. Fountaine," replied Mr. Lavington, "you have acted with a forbearance, a generosity towards me I can never forget. Be then generous still; I have never given you cause to doubt my honour. Give me credit then for what I say to be the truth. I admire, I revere, and O, sir! did I indulge the feeling, I could love Miss Betsy Fountaine more than life itself! But there is an obstacle, an unconquerable obstacle, which, though it may rest in this heart till it destroys its vital functions, must for ever rest there unspoken! Mr. Fountaine, let me not forfeit your esteem, together with all hope of my own happiness."

He held forth his hand as he spoke; the tears started to his eyes, and he looked with earnest entreaty at Mr. Fountaine. There is something in the force of unaffected truth in a simple-minded man which carries conviction along with it, where the opposite party is not blinded by prejudice or

passion. Fortunate was it for young Lavington that Mr. Fountaine, whose temper had been softened by years and affliction, had given a timely check to his angry feelings in an earlier part of this interview. He now looked upon Edward with a scrutinizing eye, yet not with an unkind one; his manner was grave, yet frank; for, whatever might be the nature of young Lavington's secret, he felt it was not a trifling one; and to conceal a truth from motives of honour, which exposes him who so conceals it to misapprehension and suffering, requires a strength of character that is in itself great.

There are occasions in life when, under the influence of strong feelings, words become needless to speak our convictions; a look, a shake of the hand, will convey all that is necessary, give assurance to the doubting mind, and dispel its apprehensions. Even so was it now; for, as Mr. Fountaine took Edward's proffered hand and gave it a hearty shake, he felt assured that, however much he might have dis appointed the old gentleman's plans for his grand-daughter and himself, however strange and inexplicable he might deem his rejection of them, he had neither seriously offended him, nor was he suspected by him of having spoken other than the truth. But, seeing Squire Dickons at this moment crossing the lawn, and unable to bear the presence of a man of an ordinary character under his present excited state of feeling, he begged Mr. Fountaine to excuse him. As he was about to withdraw, the latter called after him and said, "I shall leave you something to do for me after my death; it is something I am quite certain you can do; so do not refuse me in this also."

"Any thing you will, sir," said Mr. Lavington; "do with me as you will. In every way you overcome me with your generosity, whilst I must appear to you the most thankless of men, the most unaccountably blind to my own happiness."

"Think no more of it," said Mr. Fountaine. "I hope, whatever may be the cause, it is one that will not interfere with your views in other matters. I hope no foolish entanglement with any girl that your father would not approve—and yet it cannot be that, because you are, I know, an honourable fellow; and I am sure you like Betsy; and, as I think, Betsy likes you. But, be the crotchet what it may, I forgive you; and more than that; depend upon it, young gentleman," he added (a little sense of family pride returning, as the soft-

ened feeling occasioned by the sight of Edward's distress passed away), "depend upon it, Miss Betsy Fountaine need not go begging for a husband any day; nor need her old grandfather for her. But here comes Squire Dickons; so, as you must go, I wish you a good afternoon."

CHAPTER XV.

Shs is a woman—therefore may be woo'd ;
She is a woman—therefore may be won.

SHAKSPERE.

Trust me—with women worth the being won,
The softest lover ever best succeeds.

HILL.

EDWARD retreated, and Squire Dickons, whistling to a couple of dogs that had been the companions of his walk, entered the room. He just brushed past Mr. Lavington in the porch, as he quitted the hall with hasty steps. Squire Dickons looked after him over his shoulder, as he came in; and then, giving a very knowing wink at Mr. Fountaine, said with a smile, "The thing's done, eh? gone to look after my god-daughter?"

"No," said Mr. Fountaine, in a very short manner; "talk no more about it. You were quite as much mistaken as Hannah in all you told me. He will not have her—so let us talk no more about it. We, my old friend, must not calculate on the whims of young people; the world is turned upside down since our young days; and boys and girls do now with impunity what for their lives they dared not have done thirty years ago—they refuse, without rhyme or reason, I can assure you."

"But you don't mean to say," said Squire Dickons, with wonderment impressed on every feature, "that yon jackanapes of a doctor, who brushed by me just now, has refused my god-daughter, Miss Betsy Fountaine, when offered to him by her own grandfather?"

"But I do mean to say it, for it is the truth," replied Mr. Fountaine.

Squire Dickons gave a long whistle; but in a very different note to that in which he had just before whistled to his

dogs; and followed up this musical expression of his surprise by saying, "And did you stand by quietly and let him do it? Why did you not kick him out of the house, after putting such an affront upon you and the young lady?"

"Why, because, to tell you the truth, Squire, though I confess I felt my passion rising at first, on second thoughts—and it is not very often I listen to them—yet, on second thoughts, I judged he did very right."

"I protest you are as great a puzzle as he," said Squire Dickons; "I can't make it all out? What does all this mean?"

"I will tell you," said Mr. Fountaine. "But first, Squire, take a glass of punch. Come, we will drink a health to Betsy, and a good husband to her, in spite of all that has yet happened."

"I can't make it out at all," said Squire Dickons. "I can't comprehend it. A fine girl is a fine girl; and your estate is your estate; and for a young fellow to have both prizes at his command, without so much as even having to walk over the course to win them, and coolly to give in, and let anybody who would start for the plate, is beyond all belief. He must be drunk or mazed, I should think, this afternoon."

"Neither, I do assure you," said Mr. Fountaine, "but very far from it; and he seemed to suffer so much in refusing all hope of her, that I felt much for him."

"He isn't married already, is he, think you?" said Squire Dickons, who could see no other obstacle that was invincible.

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Fountaine, "for he is a most honourable young man, and I am certain would never have paid the attention he did here unless he had an affection for my grand-daughter. There is something in his conduct that neither of us knows anything about; but I do not believe anything will come out to his discredit."

"La! now I think of it," said Squire Dickons, across whose mind a sudden idea seemed to shoot a ray of light over these mysteries, "I wonder now whether young Maynard has anything to do with it?"

"Young Maynard! what do you mean?" said Mr. Fountaine, in a tone of surprise.

"Why, I don't know," said Squire Dickons, scratching his head, as if to help him to a clearer statement of its contents—"I don't know but that there may be something in it,

and that Lavington may suspect Miss Betsy likes Maynard better than she does him."

Mr. Fountaine looked very serious. "Pray explain yourself, Squire," he said; "I cannot think what you are driving at. Young Maynard is one of the greatest coxcombs I know in the West of England."

"Not the less likely to please a pretty woman on that account," said the Squire: "he is just the showy sort of man that my god-daughter would fancy into something of a hero of romance. And you know, neighbour, she sees very few young gentlemen, only us old fellows; she has not many to pick and choose from. And you know many a horse is thought a wonderful goer by those who have never seen the paces of a racer. We are all hackneys, or hunters, or racers, till comparison shows what we really are, Mr. Fountaine, when we come to the start, and set off neck and neck together."

Squire Dickons, in his rough way, had here hit upon a truth: Miss Betsy Fountaine had seen very few young gentlemen indeed, and, aided by her own lively imagination, was, therefore, very likely to make a false estimate, and to fancy the mere glitter of smooth and fashionable manners to be the gold of sterling worth.

"That may be the case," said Mr. Fountaine, in reply to the Squire's remarks; "but recollect, Betsy has known Mr. Lavington from her childhood; and he has more worth in his little finger than fifty such pragmatical coxcombs as Maynard in their whole bodies."

"Well, you know best," again responded Squire Dickons; "but Edward Lavington is a shy man, and, being such, Mistress Hannah says, never does himself justice. Only see those two together. Lavington, who has more sense in his head than Maynard and all his race, is always talked down by him; the one sits silent, and the other pushes himself forward—he even talks me down, sometimes. I wonder I never before thought of young Maynard; as sure as a gun, he is at the bottom of all this; and now, I'll tell you what brought it to my mind to-day, when you told me about Lavington refusing to follow up the chase."

Squire Dickons paused, and thus continued. "As I was crossing the little wood just now, near the gate that leads to Church Field, I heard a rustling, and, before anybody knew I was there, I saw a man and woman walking down the little

cross-path, very much engaged with one another, talking too low to be heard. But he had his arm thrown round her; one hand on her shoulder, and, with the other, I saw him give her a flower he took from his button-hole. I did not notice it much. But by-and-by I heard him kiss her—I am sure I did; and then I knew there must be some love in it. By-and-by, my dogs begin to bark, and that startled the pair: and so away they shot, like a couple of hares before the hounds, and the girl's cloak fell off; he stooped down to give it her; and then I saw who the parties were—young Maynard the curate and Miss Betsy Fountaine. But I, knowing you were going to marry her to somebody else, thought this was nothing worth notice—only boy and girl at play together; as I knew it was very natural for a boy to kiss a girl in walking through a wood together. I always did so myself when I walked with a lass in my young days. But now you come to tell me about the strange way in which young Lavington refuses my god-daughter, I begin to think she may like the parson better than the doctor; and that's the real cause of it, and all this trouble."

"I hope not—I trust not," said Mr. Fountaine; "but you have distressed me very much; and yet I know not how to act. I have been so unfortunate in the management of my own daughters in former years, that I am afraid of falling into a like error about Betsy. Mine is a most anxious task."

"Women are very difficult things to deal with," said Squire Dickons; "very skittish and very perverse, and always want the curb. Give them their head but a little, and away they go—there's no stopping them."

"Well, I'll think of what is best to be done," said Mr. Fountaine; and, seeming to work his mind into a good deal of passionate feeling as he suffered his thoughts to dwell on the subject, he added with great warmth, "I tell you, Squire, though Betsy is dear to me—dear even as *she* was "—(pointing to his wife's picture)—"dear even as the very viper who afterwards stung me with a wound that has never healed, I would rather see her in her coffin at my feet than see her the wife of that coxcomb Maynard." He struck the table with his hand as he spoke. "But I will think what must be done. I will consult with my pillow—my best counsellor. In the interval let us talk of business. I have already promised to tell you at full my reasons for now believing my daughter

Martha to be dead. Listen, then—for, unless you attend to every particular, you will not clearly understand how you are to act in the event of my death. You will be one of my executors, and one of the guardians of Betsy Fountaine; I shall tell you presently whom I have chosen for the other."

"Very good," said Squire Dickons; "but Miss Martha was my first sweetheart among your daughters, Mr. Fountaine, and was to have been my second wife. She played me a dog's trick; but I bear her no ill-will, and am sorry to hear you say you are so sure she is dead."

"You shall hear," said Mr. Fountaine. "The mother of Captain Samford, to whom I did some service, sent to me not many weeks ago. She was on her death-bed; her object was to ask my pardon, without which she said she could not die happy, for having had a hand in deceiving me some years ago about my daughter. I was startled at this opening; and I soon found she had indeed made me an ungrateful return; for I had saved her, and her boy too, from ruin. But that is not to the purpose. She then proceeded to inform me that, finding her son, Captain Samford, and my daughter Martha, were so much in love with each other that nothing could prevail with either to listen to reason, she promised to keep their secret provided they married without making her a party concerned in the affair, so that, in case, after it was done, I might seek from her information, she might with truth say she knew nothing about it. This I considered a very juggling sort of honesty, and more especially on the part of Mrs. Samford towards me."

"It was so, truly," said Squire Dickons.

"Mrs. Samford further confessed," continued Mr. Fountaine, "that, all things being previously arranged, on the Monday morning that we missed her Martha arose early, and Captain Samford, having managed to get into the poultry-yard, where, it seems, he often met her and told his tale, carried her off, having a boat in readiness not far off. The boat rowed them down the river into the adjacent harbour. Captain Samford's vessel was in the offing; the runaway was soon on board with her lover; the chaplain of the ship married them. Soon after she sailed for foreign parts. Martha never returned to England, always remaining abroad, where she dwelt, when her husband was obliged to bring his vessel home. On my asking why my daughter had so long concealed from me her marriage, and that she was alive, Mrs.

Samford answered, because she was conscious she had acted in such a manner towards me that she thought I could never forgive her, or see her more. But her marriage was not blest—all her children, except the youngest boy, died, and her husband died also very suddenly at last. She then determined to return home from the island of Jamaica, where she lost him. For that purpose she embarked with her little boy on board a homeward-bound British merchantman. The voyage was unprosperous, a fearful gale sprang up near a dangerous reef, the vessel was wrecked, and every soul on board perished."

"Poor Martha!" said Squire Dickons, "and her poor little fatherless boy! and was this their end?"

"It was truly," said Mr. Fountaine, with a sigh, "another page of disaster in the sad history of my daughters. And now, Squire, you know the reason why I have come to the resolution to dispose anew of my affairs, seeing that Martha, my eldest born, is dead. She, you perceive, like all the rest of them, did me injustice; first, by her disobedience in running away from me, and next, by thinking I never could forgive it—thus leaving me for twenty years in doubt and suspense about her, a prey to self-reproach. She was a wilful woman, and her conduct proved she required restraint. But I forgive her."

"And so do I, too," said the Squire; "though I must say Miss Martha did not act handsomely by me to let me have my house new painted, and my wedding-suit made, and new liveries for my servants, and the settlements drawn, if all the time she intended to run away with somebody else. But I forgive her, and am sorry for her death."

"May she rest in peace!" said Mr. Fountaine. "Unfortunate man that I am! Let me but once settle my affairs, and marry my grand-daughter as well as I can, and then I care not how soon I am gathered to my rest in the old vault."

"I hope, neighbour, you may yet live for many a long year, to empty many a bowl of punch in this very room," said Squire Dickons, helping himself to another glass; "but it is as well to be prepared, so now let us hear about the will."

"All that you need hear about it is this," said Mr. Fountaine, "I shall leave everything, except a few legacies and annuities, to my grand-daughter, Betsy Fountaine, making

you and young Mr. Lavington her joint guardians; and she is not to marry without your united consents, the guardians to act as my executors."

"Mr. Lavington!" said Squire Dickons, in a tone of surprise. "Well, you know best, to be sure, about your own affairs; but, after what happened to-day, it seems odd, I should think ——"

"Now, I do think," said Mr. Fountaine, "that a man who can refuse the hand of a young woman he likes well enough to make himself unhappy about her, and who is an heiress to boot, and refuses her from some strong motive of honour —for I am sure it is a motive of honour that governs him— proves himself to be so honest, so above all selfish and mean feelings, that I consider him to be the very best person I can name to act with you as the fellow-guardian of Betsy Fountaine; and more especially as I think she may need the protection of a younger man than yourself, Squire Dickons; for I confess what you have told me about Maynard has caused me much uneasiness, much anxiety, on her account."

CHAPTER XVI.

Neat, trimly dressed,
Fresh as a bridegroom; and his chin, new mow'd,
Show'd like a stubble-field at harvest-home.
He was perfumed like a milliner,
And 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held
A pouncet-box, which ever and anon he gave his nose,
Who, therewith angry, when it next came there,
Took it in snuff—and still he smiled and talked.
* * * *
He made me mad
To see him shine so bright, and smell so sweet,
And talk so like a waiting gentlewoman.

SHAKSPERE

SYDNEY MAYNARD was about twenty-six years old when he became curate to Mr. Nixon. He was in person rather below the middle stature, and inclined to be stout. He had good, regular features, fine dark eyes, a broad full face, and white teeth; with well-brushed, silky hair (for he did not wear a wig), and a very fair skin; with a colour in his cheeks so

bright that the schoolgirls at Exeter used to think him pretty. His leg was nicely turned, and he wore a well-shaped shoe. His black suit was one of the best cut, and always looked new. He had a gentlemanly—indeed, a fashionable air, which, at Fountaine Hall, was a novelty. His voice was soft, and his address flowing; he could sing well and play the guitar. He trained goldfinches and canaries, to make presents to old ladies; and cultivated myrtles and geraniums, to make bouquets for the young ones. He praised everything and liked everybody; was exceedingly artificial; and, by a few attentions that cost very little trouble, bestowed on high and low, rich and poor, became very popular. The old ladies sent him their gooseberry wine and their preserves; the young ones knitted purses for him; and the farmers' wives and daughters presented offerings of geese, ducks, and eggs.

Having taken his degree as Master of Arts at Oxford, and being well read in the "Evening Mail" and in "The Town and Country Magazine" (then the fashionable newspaper and periodical of the day)—the first gave him an air of great political information with the country squires, and the last an abundance of small talk with their ladies; whilst a few pieces of poetry which he had learnt from "Dodsley's Miscellany" when a boy at school, and which he took frequent occasion to repeat in company, procured for him a reputation for taste and an astonishing memory. Yet, with all these endowments—natural and acquired—in nothing did the Reverend Mr. Sydney Maynard rise above mediocrity; all his opinions were of the received kind—he never differed from the general voice, and never ran counter to fashion. What could a man do more to become pleasing? And very speedily did he find himself established in universal favour.

Society, taken in the aggregate, is not ungrateful, and he who scruples not by the arts of flattery to make every one with whom he converses more pleased with himself by being in his company, will be sure, like Mr. Maynard, universally to be considered agreeable. It was not altogether without cause that Mr. Fountaine entertained fears about young Maynard, and nothing could be more true than Squire Dickons' remark that Miss Betsy had very few among whom to choose. Had she seen more of that class of society in which she was entitled to move—had her opportunities been greater, young Maynard was the last person to whom she

would have given a thought; but, as it was, he, in all probability, was the very man to catch the fancy of an imaginative girl.

Betsy was very fond of poetry, very enthusiastic, and read abundance of that class of romances which describe everything with exaggeration, so that she fancied that adventure and passion await a beautiful girl wherever she turns her steps. With such prepossessions, therefore, and seeing scarcely any one but her grandfather's old friends—the rector; Mr. Sheriff, the attorney; Squire Dickons and his dogs; old Dr. Lavington, with his wig of unchangeable buckle, and the perpetual snuff-coloured coat of his son—in contrast with these, how could young Maynard do other than appear to advantage?

With this exception, Mr. Edward Lavington was the only young man of the circle; and he was so shy and retiring, so fond of quiet, talking even before her about the state of her grandfather's pulse, and prescribing, for his gout, flannels and water-gruel, that he never presented himself to her fancy in any way connected with poetry and romance. There was nothing to stir the imagination in his lancets, his gallipots, and his potions.

But the young curate, how different was he to all this! All those high and holy thoughts with which Betsy had ever connected her feelings for the Church and its ministers, she now bestowed on Sydney Maynard, the youthful priest, who appeared before her every Sabbath day, either in his surplice of pure white with its simply beautiful folds (the most graceful of all garments) or in his robe and gown of black silk, and his violet gloves. And then the sanctity of his profession! she confounded it with the man himself, and invested him with all its heavenly aspirations, its unbounded charity, and no small portion of its love.

Nothing is more dangerous than ideas such as these dwelt upon in retirement—nay, all but solitude—where there is little probability of anything arising to break the spell. Vain and silly women are usually caught at once by the red coat of an officer. But, with an imaginative girl who has heart and feeling, nothing is so dangerous as a handsome and soft-spoken young clergyman, with all the minor graces to keep up the prestige for which he is frequently indebted to female fancy alone. Such a being as Sydney Maynard is often found irresistible, and speedily turns the heads of the old and the young, of the maiden and the widow, who some-

times become dupes by the force of their own imaginations.

I have said more on this subject than I at first intended, because I loved Miss Betsy Fountaine so well that I wish, even for my own satisfaction, to be able in some degree to account for the strange infatuation that possessed her.

She certainly did love "the graceful Sydney," as she would call him, with a depth and ardour of affection of which he was never worthy, and which he never could appreciate, having in himself nothing that had any kindred with her generous nature. Mr. Fountaine, Hannah, Squire Dickons, and myself, all saw which way her affections inclined, and we were all sorry for it, for not one of us thought he could deserve her. His arts took with nobody but Miss Betsy at the Hall. Neither Hannah nor Mr. Fountaine were deficient in penetration, notwithstanding the mistake they had made in fancying, in the first instance, that Mr. Lavington would be the young lady's choice. But that mistake arose from observing that something was amiss with her, which, whatever it might be, had touched her heart and weighed on her spirits. And, as they never thought a girl so superior as herself could be dazzled by the tinsel of a Sydney Maynard, they concluded that Mr. Edward Lavington, so well deserving a youth, must be the object of her regard, and Mr. Fountaine had acted accordingly. And now, though undeceived, he feared to act either suddenly or rigorously, too well remembering the fate of his own daughters. He resolved then to proceed cautiously, and hoped that time and a little more experience would lead her to form a better judgment, and to see the folly of what both Hannah and himself called "a girl's idle fit of love."

But they had yet to learn the strength and constancy of Betsy Fountaine's impressions—let them be for good or evil. Weak minds are seldom constant, and are not often to be relied upon. From a girl of a weaker spirit they might have reasonably hoped for a change; but Betsy was not a feeble character. And Mr. Fountaine rapidly grew more ailing and more infirm, and was evidently approaching the end of his days, and had yet seen no alteration in Betsy's predilection for young Maynard.

CHAPTER XVII.

What could I more ?
I warned thee, I admonished thee ; foretold
The danger, and the lurking enemy
That lay in wait—beyond this had been force,
And force upon free will hath here no place.
MILTON.

These are the effects of fearful age,
Vain doubts, and idle cares, and over-caution.
DRYDEN.

I PASS in silence the particulars of six months of illness and suffering, which, all things considered, Mr. Fountaine bore with more patience than could have been expected from a man of his naturally irritable and arbitrary temper. But the course of years and of events, as I before noticed, had greatly softened, if they did not alter, the character of his mind. It has been the constant theme of moralists, that age has no pleasures but what are derived from the contemplation of the past, or the hopes of a future beyond the grave. With Mr. Fountaine, in respect to the past, it was, however, different, for, though worn with age and the labour of life, his reminiscences afforded him very few pleasures, but a great many pains. He was naturally a proud and imperious man, but not an ungenerous one; and, though often blind to truth, he never hardened himself against its dictates, when, on conviction, he was compelled to receive it.

Shut out by age and the growing infirmities of his latter years from all his field-sports, and his more boisterous sporting companions, whilst the more worthy of that class, such as Squire Dickons, were insufficient to fill up with their company the many long and tedious hours of the day, Mr. Fountaine had gradually given himself to better and wiser pursuits than he had ever known in the restless years or the wild days of his youth. He also acquired what is so rare where no previous habits have led to it, and what none but a man of strong and original powers of mind could ever hope to attain at so late a period of life, namely, a fondness for books.

For this taste he was probably, in the first instance, indebted to his grand-daughter. When quite a little child, it was Betsy's delight to bring her fable or story-book to grandpapa, and to show him how well she could read in it. Squire

Dickons's gift of the great Bible was next produced by the little lady, and she would point out to him Adam and Eve in the first leaf; and then, as her grandfather became more frequently laid up with fits of the gout, she would read to him whole chapters from that book; till at length Mr. Fountaine found himself so well entertained by these matters that when neither the house-steward, nor the dogs, nor the punch-bowl engaged him, he would cause little Betsy to be called into the oak parlour, to take her seat on a low stool at his feet, and there to read to him till he either fell asleep or was kept awake by the subject.

Betsy, willing to enlarge his delight, as she grew up, enlarged the circle of books with which she amused him; so that, at last, after the chapters for the day were read, she would introduce voyages, travels, and many an able author, for his instruction. At length, Mr. Fountaine discovered that blessed secret, that a vast deal of agreeable entertainment can be gained by books. Mr. Fountaine was himself surprised to think how well, in general, he got through his days, without hounds, and hunters, and horns.

Perhaps no elderly person, of strong natural powers of mind, ever found a pleasure in reading, without at the same time acquiring, more or less, a habit of meditating. Mr. Fountaine did so, and his reflections were often of a very painful kind. No longer under the influence of passion, in these calm moments of his decay, when the powers of the body were much weakened, but those of the mind unimpaired, he could not recal the past without suspecting he had acted hastily and indiscreetly about his daughters. And the more he came to think on these matters, the more did he confess to Hannah (whose confidential chat and unceasing attendance was become necessary to his very existence) that he blamed himself. It is true he did not say this to Hannah more than once; but such an acknowledgment from a man of a character naturally so proud was a great thing, and showed more real self-condemnation than the most frequent confessions of weaker minds, whose self-accusations do not often outlive the first moments of conviction.

Whether it might be from infirmity, or that the course of years, as they rolled on alone, had served to wear down the asperities of his nature as a perpetually flowing stream will wear smooth the irregularities of the hardest rocks; or whether the fond love he cherished for his grand-daughter

had softened him, certain it is, towards the close of life, his temper and habits much improved, so that he grew patient, even though the gout was upon him, and that too in the most distressing degree.

Dr. Lavington and his son, who were in constant attendance, began to think very seriously of his case, and that he could not hold out much longer. Every one at the Hall had been told this, except Mr. Fountaine himself; but he was not slow to find it out. The grave and anxious looks of Hannah and all about him; the tears that would rush into his grand-daughter's eyes; the evasive answers of the physician; and, above all, his own feelings, convinced him that the hour which, sooner or later, comes to all, was hastening towards him with no slow pace.

Ill as he was, he could not bear altogether to lie in bed. One afternoon, he was removed to an easy chair, propped up by pillows, his legs placed on cushions, on one of which Betsy's spaniel had intruded, as Betsy herself took her seat by his side. She opened the Bible; and, having read to her grandfather several chapters, endeavoured to soothe the hours of his decay by paying him those thousand little attentions which, from the young and lovely to the aged and infirm, have in them a grace peculiarly their own.

Hannah was also in the room, busied with cordials and other matters. I was present, seated under one of the windows, working at my needle; for, since the severe illness of Mr. Fountaine, my mother and Miss Betsy wished me to remain at the Hall; so that he might always have one of us with him; and not be left, at any time, entirely to the charge of servants. We often, therefore, relieved each other in our attendance in the sick room. On the table which stood near the invalid, strange as it may seem, there was the punch-bowl, together with some drinking-glasses: not, however, that Mr. Fountaine now partook of such things,—but Squire Dickons had called in; he came, indeed, every day, and the old gentleman had ordered the punch for his refreshment.

Near the table sat that worthy, trying his hand, as he did whenever he came, at the office of comforter to his old friend in the hours of his suffering. The fire was blazing on the hearth, for it was towards the close of autumn, and rather cold.

The sun, however, about an hour before setting, was bright and cheerful, and tinged with a yellow hue the fine old trees

in the park that were now clothed in their russet livery. The river flowed placidly through the grounds, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, and the purple and white circling clouds, in that deep, still beauty with which the landscape and the heavens are ever seen to repose on the bosom of tranquil waters; whilst, here and there, the rays of the sun touched their broad expanse with a golden glow of trembling light. The deer, still and motionless, reposed under the branches of the spreading oaks and beeches; and the rooks, beginning to collect together, were cawing in concert, as if to give the signal, preparatory to their flight after their dusky leaders to the old rookery, which now, for more than a century, their forefathers of the feathered tribe had called their own.

Beyond the domain were seen the distant hills of Haldon, now of the deepest and richest purple. In the middle distance appeared several white cottages that constituted the village. These now sent up their smoke in undisturbed columns of light blue vapour; for the winds seemed as if they slumbered, and scarcely a breath of air moved the most delicate flower. The tower of the village church rose above the surrounding cottages and trees, glittering in the sunbeams, and forming a point of view that was striking from contrast. At this moment, the silver tone of its musical bells flung a pleasing harmony over the stillness of the scene: the ringers were practising on their usual day.

The chair in which Mr. Fountaine was seated commanded the largest window on the opposite side of the room, through which could be seen the pleasing landscape I have just described. The light of the autumn sun streamed into the chamber; and, as the poor sufferer raised his head to contemplate the scene without, I chanced to look up. I was struck with the expression of his countenance, and thought he was very much changed since the previous evening, when I had seen him about the same hour. His skin was of that grey-white, if I may use the term, which gives such a death-like hue to the whole face: the features were thin and sunk, the nose sharpened, and the eye, though not settled, unusually bright. I did not like to see it. I thought he appeared very ill; and I looked at the old clock, which ticked audibly in the sick room, to observe the hour, as I felt anxious for the arrival of the doctor.

The light fell on our dear master, and showed but too

plainly all those marks of change, and seemed to render distinct, as so many threads of silver, every white hair upon his head. Mr. Fountaine spoke. Betsy, who did not instantly catch what he said (as she sat holding his hand within hers), asked, in her sweetest manner, if he wanted anything.

He removed his eyes from the landscape without, and fixed them with a speaking look on her face; then with his hand stroked down her beautiful sunny locks, and passed it over her fair cheek.

"No, Betsy, no," replied Mr. Fountaine to her question; "I want nothing. Just now I believe I was half speaking aloud my own thoughts; for one anxious thought often possesses me—it is about you. Ah, Betsy! I know where I shall be when the next autumn leaves begin to fall; but I know not where you will be, nor with whom, yet I fear——" He sighed deeply.

Betsy looked down, and a conscious blush overspread her cheek.

"Where will you be, my dear sir," said Squire Dickons, "and Miss Betsy, next autumn time? Why, I hope, please God, alive and well, the master of Fountaine Hall, with no fit of the gout upon you, these flannels thrown off, and the doctor and the megrims gone with them. My good old friend, I do think you have had the vapours much of late; but no wonder, you have not been out but once for the shooting season. I should have them myself if I could not follow my dogs and handle my gun. And then, these confounded doctors keep you so low! Don't you think you could take a little punch—just a glass or so, to raise your spirits? And Mrs. Hannah need not say a word about it to Mr. Lavington."

Mr. Fountaine shook his head. "No, my good friend," he said, "it will not do; neither punch, nor dog, nor gun, can ever raise me up more, though in my time I have enjoyed those things as much as any man. Squire, you know we must all have our last hunt one day or other; and I tell you I shall never follow horn or hound more."

"Don't say so," said Squire Dickons, with a most rueful countenance. "I never can bear to hear such things from you. I never could see one of my old dogs die without feeling cut up by it; and how much more an old friend!"

"I wish Parson Nixon had been at home," said Hannah;

"for my master told me this morning he should have been glad to have had some talk with him. I wish Parson Nixon had been at home."

"His curate is," said Betsy, in a soft, hesitating voice, accompanied by another blush.

"If you mean that puppy, Sydney Maynard, I will not see him!" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine, in an angry tone; and he seemed much disturbed.

"No, sir, no," said Hannah, anxious to relieve him. "Mr. Nixon has two curates just now, you know; it is of Mr. Wheatley Miss Betsy would speak."

Betsy hung down her head, but said not a word to confirm Hannah's assertions.

"I don't know that she means any such man," replied Mr. Fountaine, still speaking in an angry manner. "I know, however, but little of the other one—Maynard, I mean—except that he is a foolish boy. But I wish, indeed, Parson Nixon had been at home. I should have been very glad to have seen him in my present state."

"Don't think about it, my dear friend," said Squire Dickons. "I hope it is not so bad as that with you, to need a parson. You are certainly very low-spirited to-day. I wish I could think of anything to amuse you—any news. But the races are put off for a fortnight, and there is nothing stirring around us just now; nothing cheerful or entertaining. Bless me, how sorry I am I forgot to put in my coat-pocket the newspapers which I get once a month from London; the carrier brought them from Exeter only this day. In one of them is the full and true account, with the last dying speech and confession, of the execution of Elizabeth Canning, a beautiful young creature, only nineteen years old, who, at the instigation of the devil, murdered her husband, and, according to sentence passed on trial, was first strangled, and then burnt alive in the amphi—amphitheatre, or some such word, I think it says on the paper, at Dorchester, a place as old as the Romans, in sight of ten thousand people, who came to see her executed.* How sorry I am I forgot the paper! it would have been so amusing for you in a sick room. But here comes Mr. Lavington to see you; there he is, crossing the lawn. Shall I go, or shall I stay? I know the doctors

* Elizabeth Canning, who suffered in the amphitheatre at Dorchester, was the last woman burnt in England for the murder of a husband. She denied her guilt to the last.

very often like their confabs to be like their potions—great secrets."

"Stay, by all means," said Mr. Fountaine. "Let all here stay. It is my particular wish that what I have to say should be in the presence of you, Squire, and of your god-daughter, Betsy; for you will be her principal, if not her sole, guardian when I am gone. And as to Hannah and her daughter there—why, Hannah has been as a mother to her, and Hannah's daughter nursed her and saved her life when she was newly-born; only second in kindness to Hannah herself. I beg of you all to stay."

You may suppose we all expected something out of the usual course by this preface, but certainly not what followed.

Mr. Lavington entered, with that quiet, modest, melancholy air, that had of late so much marked his manners whenever he came to the Hall. He kindly addressed Mr. Fountaine, spoke politely to Miss Betsy, and had a good-natured word for us all. He then apologised to his patient for his father, the physician, not coming that evening to see him, saying, that some indisposition, from which he had of late suffered much, had so increased upon him, he could not venture out towards evening; but he would drive over and see Mr. Fountaine in the morning.

"Ay, my dear sir," said Mr. Fountaine, "your father and myself are both getting old men; and the sand in our glasses runs low; mine is almost at its last grains. I feel it, Mr. Lavington; not only the gout, but something within me whispers it is so. I need not ask either yourself or your father, had he been with you this day, to be sincere with me, and to tell me, what I know myself—that my hours are numbered. There are some things that weigh deeply on my mind, and concern those who are here present. I would not leave what I have to say to the last, when I may have no power to say it; and yet, possibly, sense enough left to feel all the anxiety of dying, with the truth unspoken in my heart. Mr. Lavington, let me entreat you to come on this side my chair. No, do not feel my pulse till I have done. It will be time enough to think about the health of the body when I have attended to that of the mind."

He paused. We were all profoundly silent. Hannah drew nearer; but I kept my place by the window.

"My will," said Mr. Fountaine to Hannah, "will be found, when I am gone, in the iron chest, with my title-deeds. You

will deliver it, Hannah, to these gentlemen, Squire Dickons and Mr. Lavington; they are my executors. A paper of directions respecting some things I wish to be done will be found with it: they were not of importance enough to be in the will itself. I have given all necessary directions about my funeral. You, Hannah, who, by your long service and fidelity, deserve to be considered as a friend of the Fountaine family—you I have provided for in a manner that cannot be said to equal your merit, but will be sufficient to show my value for you, and to provide for your age every comfort. This house, I trust, you will never quit; as I hope you will continue to be the mother, the friend, of my grand-daughter, such as you have ever been to her. And, Hannah, I have one feeling about you, in respect to myself: I hope you will follow my remains to the grave."

"O, sir! my dear master!" said Hannah, bursting into tears; "I have never deserted you or yours in life, and I never will in death. So long as God spares me, I consider that, as my first worldly duty, I live for the family of Fountaine. And as to Miss Betsy—you need not ask me to stay with her, for it would kill me did she send me away from her and the old house. But O, my dear master, how shall I thank you for providing for me in my old age? Sir, I do not want. I have saved enough in your service for me and mine; and yet, indeed, I am grateful—how shall I speak my thanks?"

"Do not speak them at all, Hannah," said Mr. Fountaine. "I know you, and all you feel. But let me go on, while I can do so; for, indeed, I feel myself not so well as usual."

"And now," he continued, "for the most important subject of all. You, Betsy—did I not tell you, just now, that, although I knew well enough where I should be the next autumn, at least, where this old decaying tenement of the body would be, yet I felt anxious as to where you would be at that time, and with whom? O, Betsy! relieve me from that last and great anxiety, and I shall die happy—much happier than I have lived."

"My dearest grandpapa," said Betsy, the tears rushing into her bright eyes, "you know how much I love you."

"Ay, Betsy," said he; "but I would have you love yourself, your own peace, your own prosperity; and not throw yourself away when I am gone."

He paused, and took her hand, and thus resumed his discourse—

"This is autumn, Betsy. Look out yonder, and see how all those trees in the park are now changed. See how the green has become russet, and how the leaves drop away from the branch, and lie scattered on the ground; yet how calm and peaceful are the heavens! They seem to look upon this scene of failing and decay that lies around with a benign aspect, and to gild with a bright sun the close of this autumn day. Even so will God look upon the close of a good life, Betsy—even so may He look on yours, when your career of usefulness is run, and your day draws to an end! And so do I hope and believe it will be, unless you mar all, and bring on yourself early troubles, and perhaps an early death, by your own folly."

Betsy said not a word in reply; but she put up her handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed audibly. Her grandfather took down her hands, kissed her tenderly, and thus continued—

"I would not pain you, my child, but I would caution you. Betsy, I have left you an heiress—the sole heiress to a very large estate. Remember, it is a great trust. Be careful that, in serving others, you do not injure yourself. Consult your friends here; they will advise you; do not suffer any one to step in and lead you to give up a career of usefulness for one of folly." He turned to Squire Dickons—

"You, my worthy friend," he said; "you I have named as a guardian to this dear child, and you also, Mr. Lavington. She will have no power to marry and to retain possession of my estate without your joint consent. I know you will be kind to her; and, on so important a point as this, I earnestly beseech you to give her your best advice. And oh! with what pleasure should I close these eyes could I but see her promised to one worthy of her; one who would watch over her—protect her—as I have done, and with whom she would be happy!"

He was so much overcome as to be obliged to pause again for a few minutes. We all, I believe, wished this painful discourse might be brought to a close, for Miss Betsy could do nothing but weep; Squire Dickons did not know what to do or say, and Mr. Lavington seemed distressed and confused.

Mr. Fountaine now turned to him, and took his hand.

"Here," he said, "here, Betsy, is the friend to whom I principally leave you in charge. Squire Dickons, no offence to him, is, like me, getting an old man; he will advise you about your tenants. But Mr. Lavington is the guardian most fitted to advise with you, as you are a woman, and a young woman. He is a man of honour and a gentleman, and knows how to deal with your little nice feelings and prejudices better than the Squire here."

"Yes," said Squire Dickons, "I know something about farms and the management of cattle; and if ever Miss Betsy thought of improving her stock, particularly the breed of horses, which you, Mr. Fountaine, have too much neglected of late years, and will leave it to me, I will manage it all for her, and see justice done her at the cattle-fairs. But, as for the matter of advising about the sweethearts, why I don't know; I am afraid Miss Betsy and I might have two minds on that head. I might judge best, but she might talk better; for, if my whole estate depended on it, though I mean by her as well as any man—as well as by any of my own children—I could no more sit up in a chair and talk in the way you have been talking for the last half-hour than I could fly—no, not were it to keep my head on my shoulders; so I think, after all, Mr. Lavington will be the best hand at that. And if he could talk Miss Betsy into marrying him instead of anybody else, I think that would be the best thing of all; and then she would have an honest man for her guardian and her husband, all under one, which would save much trouble and casting about as to who was to have her; would cut out all the fortune-hunters, English or Irish, distance the coxcombs, and make her a happy woman, or I am much mistaken."

Whilst Mr. Fountaine, to use the style of Squire Dickons, had been beating the bush (for he wished to propose this very thing, but knew not how to do it for the best), the Squire, in his plain, shrewd way, started the game; and Mr. Fountaine, turning to Betsy, and taking her hand, followed it up by instantly saying, "My dearest child, your godfather does indeed but speak the truth; the utmost wish of my heart would be accomplished could I but see you united to this gentleman. Mr. Lavington, I am convinced, would rejoice to receive your hand, did you give him but the slightest encouragement to hope for it. I am convinced he regards—that he loves you. Betsy, do not slight a worthy man's

love because it is unpretending, and because he who feels it values your peace too much to make his love a trouble to you by importunity. Betsy, make your old grandfather happy before he dies, and in so doing make yourself happy too. Give me your hand" (he took it in his); "let me join it to that of Mr. Lavington. Say you will have him, and keep him for better or worse; let me live to bless you—once to bless you; to recal, in that blessing, the terrible curse which, in a moment of passion—of frenzy—I pronounced on your unhappy mother and her offspring, and then, welcome Death, if he come the next minute to close for ever these eyes, for my task on earth will be done."

In saying these last words, Mr. Fountaine grasped in one hand that of his grand-daughter, and, in the other, the hand of Mr. Lavington. He would have joined them; for, though the young surgeon said nothing, yet his countenance betrayed strong emotions—the deepest anxiety for the event. He turned pale as death, as he now ventured to look on Betsy, trembling, expecting her reply, with a feeling as if life or death hung on the next word that would pass her lips; a shudder came over his whole frame as he saw her hastily draw back her hand at the very moment her grandfather would have placed that hand in his.

As she drew it back she said, in a low but earnest voice, "Spare me, Mr. Lavington—for God's sake, spare me!"

"Sir," said Mr. Lavington, addressing Mr. Fountaine, "I cannot, as a gentleman—as a man—I cannot allow you to urge on Miss Betsy Fountaine the acceptance of a hand to which she feels so repugnant. What are my feelings—what they would have been—had she honoured me with so great a blessing as herself, I will not say. It is useless. Let me implore you to urge her no more in my behalf; for know, sir, though, as the future guardian of your beloved grand-daughter, I could, I think, die to serve her—to prove the sincerity, the strength of my feelings towards her, yet I neither can nor will accept her hand, nor that of any other woman, unless it is as freely bestowed on me by herself as by her friends. I must beg the young lady may be left at peace on my account. And let me assure her, as well as yourself, that nothing which has now passed shall ever influence me to any unpleasant remembrance of it hereafter. I hope, as her guardian, I shall always act for her good, independent of every other consideration."

"I believe it," said Mr. Fountaine; "I am assured of it."

"I confess," continued Mr. Lavington, "had you not so strenuously urged it upon me, I should have wished to decline so delicate an office. But my promise is given, and, as I may be of some little use to her hereafter, I will not retract. Madam, fear nothing from me, and let me implore you to accept my services as frankly as you would those of a brother—they shall be honestly rendered."

"I doubt it not, sir; I thank you," said Betsy. "You are generous, sir, and I am sure you will never urge on me what is painful."

"Upon my word," said Squire Dickons, "I don't understand all this, Miss Betsy. Here's my old friend, your grandfather, offering you a fine estate, and a worthy young gentleman for a husband, all under one; and I, who am your godfather, think it the best thing on earth for you; and I know Hannah thinks so too. We see what a deep stake you have at risk; we see who starts the best horse for the race that is before you. You have the judges and the odds all in your favour; and yet you draw stakes and won't run for the cup. Upon my word, Miss Betsy, I must say I can't understand it. It is not handsome to any of us."

This was the first angry speech Squire Dickons had ever ventured to make to his god-daughter in all his life. Mr. Fountaine, whilst he was making it, lay back in his chair, not seeming to hear or to heed it, but to be thinking over something of painful retrospection. All at once he resumed his former position, put his hands together, looked up, and said with energy, "O, Betsy, if deaf to every proposal which I make for your happiness, give me, at least, one consolation before I die! In the presence of these gentlemen, who, when I am gone, are to supply my place to you, promise me you will never wed Sydney Maynard."

Betsy knew not what to do or how to look. She pressed her hands together, threw herself at her grandfather's feet, and, with an energy that was almost frantic in its vehemence, implored him not to call upon her to give him any promise more than this—that she would take time before she disposed of herself hereafter; and, if she ever married, would pray to God to direct her choice.

Mr. Fountaine saw how it was; a convulsive shudder seemed to shake his whole frame, as, half addressing her, and half speaking to himself, he said, in a deep low voice,

"How could I expect other—how could it be otherwise? It is my own work; the scourge, the scorpion-whip for my own sin! Yes, miserable wretch that I am! have I not brought it on myself? Did I not curse my own daughter and her offspring? And now it recoils on myself! The offspring, the seed of the viper (as I deemed her, as I called her, when I pronounced that fatal curse upon her mother's head), rises up to sting me in my last hour, and in the tenderest point—in my love, my unbounded love for her! She, too, will disappoint all my hopes, and send down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave! I see it, I feel it! Before the next autumn comes, Betsy Fountaine will, like the rest, fall a victim to my misguided passions."

In his exceeding agitation, Mr. Fountaine attempted to rise; but, unable to stand from extreme weakness, sank again into his seat; and, in doing so, accidentally struck with his hand the table that stood near his chair. A glass upon it, which bore on its side the name of Betsy Fountaine, fell to the ground, and was shivered into a thousand pieces at his feet.

Illness and age had shaken the strength of his judgment, though not of his feelings. His countenance turned even to a yet more ghastly hue; and, as he fixed his eyes sternly on the broken pieces, the terrors of a superstitious dread stole over his soul, and, pointing with his finger to the ground, he said to the unhappy girl, who still knelt weeping near, "It is an omen of God's wrath on me and mine—Betsy Fountaine, a father's curse was uttered at thy birth, and on thee will it fall!"

Overcome by the agitation of his feelings, and by the state of excitement into which he had been wrought by this anxious scene, whose close had been so appalling, Mr. Fountaine fell back in his chair senseless; he had fainted.

Hannah, Betsy, Mr. Lavington, all present, gave their immediate assistance. But the fainting continued much longer than they expected; and, when he came a little to himself, Mr. Lavington thought him so very ill that he directed Hannah to get him into bed in all haste; and, notwithstanding his own father's state of health, despatched a messenger to procure his immediate attendance at the Hall.

When Dr. Lavington came he, as did his son, considered the hours of Mr. Fountaine numbered; the great excitement of the evening had brought on a fatal crisis; the gout was in

the stomach and head; the whole frame sinking; for, though recovered out of the first fit, he speedily fell into another and another, whilst Hannah and Betsy (the one distracted with fear, the other with self-reproach) watched over him in a state of mind which defies all attempts at description.

The symptoms continued without intermission the whole night: Mr. Fountaine never spoke more; and, towards morning, death closed the scene of his sufferings and his distress.

One week after this melancholy event, the remains of Mr. Fountaine were conducted from Fountaine Hall to the village church, which had gathered to their long home within its dusky vaults so many members of the family one after another.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In their nonage,
A sympathy unusual joined their loves;
They paired like turtles; still together drank,
Together eat, nor quarreled for the choice;
Like twining streams, both from one fountain fell,
And as they ran still mingled smiles and tears.
LEE.

AFTER the funeral the executors proceeded to their duty. In such hands the will of Mr. Fountaine was strictly and speedily fulfilled.

All debts and all legacies were paid, all annuities settled, and Miss Betsy put in possession of the old mansion as heiress, with a splendid income and estate, under the care of her two guardians, till such time as she should be of age. But all these advantages, with youth, beauty, sweetness, and every possible attraction to charm the eye or captivate the heart, did not make Betsy happy. Will all her faults she was honest, she was not a self-flatterer, and she could not conceal from her own mind that she had been the cause, by her obstinate perseverance in her predilection for young Maynard, of rendering the latter days of her grandfather very unhappy, and in all probability of hastening his death. Bitterly, most bitterly, did she reproach herself for this; but, being too frank to conceal any of her feelings, Sydney

soon learned the truth; and as he came to Fountaine Hall whenever he pleased, for there was no one to forbid him, it is to be supposed he found some means, as a lover and as a clergyman, of quieting the conscience of Miss Betsy. By degrees she became, if not more cheerful, at least more calm and less full of self-reproach than she had hitherto been, when she talked to Hannah about her poor grandfather.

Soon after Mr. Fountaine's death, Squire Dickons (who, it will be remembered, was still a widower) was called to a distant part of the county to see his eldest married daughter, and to settle her affairs for her, as she had just lost her husband; and, in consequence of the very dangerous state of his father's health, Mr. Lavington could seldom leave the old doctor to come to the Hall, or to look after his young ward. Indeed, I fancied that his own feelings induced him to shun rather than to seek the company of Miss Betsy; at least, as much as he could without giving offence; for it was quite evident to Hannah and myself that he was still much attached to her.

All these circumstances unfortunately left Miss Betsy unguarded by any observant friend who could by right have interfered with a hope to influence her. Hannah was growing old, and, though dearly beloved by her young mistress, neither had, nor could pretend to have, the authority of a parent over her; so that I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind, from many little circumstances which occurred at the time, that, at a very early period after her poor grandfather's death, Miss Betsy engaged herself to Mr. Sydney Maynard. But, if this were the fact, it was impossible she could, in common propriety, so soon after Mr. Fountaine's decease, give her hand in marriage; there must be the delay of a few months.

Seeing how very often young Maynard came to the house, Hannah pointed out to Miss Betsy that she really ought to have some one with her during his visits, since, although Miss Betsy was innocent as a child in herself, and saw no harm in these frequent calls of the young curate (more especially being engaged to him), yet the world would talk.

Betsy acknowledged the propriety of all Hannah said; thanked her for her advice, and said that she had herself been thinking much the same, and had, therefore, already written to a friend, Miss Arlington, and invited her to come upon a visit for some months to Fountaine Hall.

Miss Arlington accepted the invitation with alacrity; but, before she arrives at the Hall, I must pause to say something of her.

Miss Arlington was a young lady of good family and fortune. She was three or four years older than Miss Fountaine. She had few pretensions to beauty; but she had what was called style, an air *distingué*, and was tall and rather elegantly formed. She was always attired with exquisite taste, and when dressed and rouged she really looked handsome. She was perfectly well bred, and there was no fashionable accomplishment that she did not possess; and, though in her conversation there was neither sense nor wit, yet her manner was playful and *piquante*, as the French call it, and her voice soft and feminine, so that even nonsense passed current for something agreeable when it came from her lips.

Although, there can be no doubt, all these qualifications dazzled the inexperienced mind of Betsy Fountaine, who had never had any opportunity of forming an acquaintance with any really superior young ladies of her own station, yet it was not this that captivated her, or won upon her open and unpractised heart; it was the ardour of the young lady's character. Miss Arlington, like Betsy herself, was very romantic and enthusiastic, and professed herself to be a votary of the school of feeling. With her feeling was everything; nothing could resist it; everything must be sacrificed to it; and without feeling of the most ardent and devoted kind all love or friendship was but a name.

I shall pass with slight notice what followed during the early period of this intimacy, as it was uniformly the same. The young ladies were inseparable friends, with only this difference, that of the two Miss Arlington seemed to be most the mistress of the house; indeed, the mistress of its mistress: for, as Miss Betsy felt how inferior she was to her in the knowledge of the world and the customs of high life, she looked up to Miss Arlington for direction and instruction in almost all she said or did. Hannah and I wondered at it, as we used to fancy there was a great deal of superciliousness and conceit in the manner in which she sometimes talked to Miss Fountaine; nor did Hannah like her ordering at the Hall as if it were her own.

But she said nothing; and, as the fashionable young lady commended warmly young Mr. Maynard, I have no doubt she gained her ends by the adroitness of her flattery, and carried

into effect whatever she wanted with a high hand. Mr. Maynard was an every-day visitor, and often brought with him his brother-curate, Mr. Wheatley, with whom Miss Arlington coquetted a good deal; and then there was reading of poetry, and singing duets with the accompaniment of the harpsichord or the guitar, and in all these matters Miss Arlington always took the lead or directed, and Sydney and Betsy did just as she pleased.

So passed the first four or five months after Mr. Fountaine's death.

Every thing in this world certainly rises or lessens in value by contrast—at least, I suppose it must have been so in this case. For, unless it were that Miss Betsy had few opportunities of seeing any good society, and could, therefore, only contrast Miss Arlington with such persons as Squire Dickons's unaccomplished and rustic daughters, and the polished Sydney Maynard with the retiring, the timid, and the somewhat embarrassed Mr. Lavington, I cannot in any way account for a girl of her good sense and feeling, and so infinitely superior to them both in every respect, being so taken with their tinsel, or so infatuated with their mountebank manners and artful pretensions.

CHAPTER XIX.

Dost thou deem
It such an easy task from the fond breast
To root affection out?

SOUTHEY.

ONE morning, Mr. Lavington came to wait on Miss Fountaine. He was in deep mourning. An air of profound melancholy appeared on every feature of his expressive countenance. I met him in the hall. He told me he wished to see his ward, without the presence of Miss Arlington, as he had something of the utmost importance to say to her.

Accordingly, he was ushered in. Betsy seemed agitated. She had an undefined feeling of awe in the presence of Mr. Lavington; it might not be friendly to love (had she ever been disposed to love him) but it certainly was to esteem, as she held his character, to use her own words, in veneration; he was so uniformly good and amiable. I wish she had felt

less awe of him; for in that case she might have loved one who would have been worthy of her; but love him she did not.

When Mr. Lavington entered, he took her hand with much emotion, but could not speak. Betsy observed his mourning dress and his distress; and, grasping his hand, she said some words of kindly sympathy for the loss of his father, with all the native warmth and energy of her disposition. She had never before addressed him with so much kindness; and her words and manner, always affectionate where she wished to soothe or to please, came like balm upon the wounded mind of the bereaved son.

"I thank you, madam," he said; "indeed I thank you; though, so strong are my feelings at this moment, they overcome my power to express them. It was not, however, merely to thank you for the attention you showed during the illness of my father, that I came here this morning. It is my duty that has brought me to you—my duty as your guardian. And O, madam, a most painful one do I fear it will prove to us both. But you know well the confidence your grandfather reposed in me, and what he expected of me when he confided to me so sacred a trust; I neither can nor will abuse it. The wishes of the dead shall be fulfilled, as much as if a voice from the grave called me to their fulfilment. Yet the task—the pain—the struggle—the wish to spare—oh! pardon me, Miss Fountaine, pardon me, when I say that, whatever may be my wishes to make you happy—and God knows they are the first of my heart—yet not even my consideration for the living shall make me forget what I owe to the trust reposed in me by the dead."

He paused. This exordium produced the most powerful effect on the young lady to whom it was addressed. She turned pale, trembled in every limb, and sank into a chair; for Betsy Fountaine neither wanted sense nor penetration, and she could see in a moment to what all this tended. Mr. Maynard's intimacy was much talked of, and the gossips of the neighbourhood had long ago averred that she would be married to him as soon as her mourning was at an end. Notwithstanding the high opinion she had formed of young Maynard, she always entertained an intuitive conviction that he and her guardian, Mr. Lavington, never could like each other. It was impossible two men so opposite in character ever could sympathise; independently of the no less strong

conviction which had impressed itself even on her inexperienced mind, that two men who love the same woman seldom meet together with other than feelings too much akin to rancour and suspicion to be capable of the sentiments of friendship and esteem. How, then, could she expect his consent to her marriage with a rival, who was hated by her grandfather even to his last hour? No wonder Betsy betrayed so much agitation. She attempted a reply to him, but could not get beyond a few confused words.

With a degree of agitation scarcely less than her own, Mr. Lavington continued—

"Miss Fountaine, I am come to speak to you on the subject of giving your hand in marriage; it is a serious one for you and for me, if I must give my consent to it."

"O, sir," said Betsy, "let me beseech you to spare me all unnecessary pain. I know how great is the magnanimity of your character, and I will confide in it still. O, Mr. Lavington! I neither shall nor can forget that to your generous forbearance I was indebted for being spared a most distressing persecution on the part of my grandfather. Do you think I can ever cease to respect, to reverence you, when I remember, at the very moment my poor grandfather had decided on making me the heiress to his estate, you, whilst you honoured me with your affections—those affections of which I was never worthy—at my instance alone, and in consequence of my earnest prayer for your forbearance, refused all—refused fortune, favour, the woman you loved, and risked offending for ever the friend who so loved you, to comply with my wishes, with my acknowledged preference for another! O, Mr. Lavington! could you think me insensible to greatness such as this, or thankless for it, I should despise myself! But I am not ungrateful. You know the truth. Spare me, then, all remonstrance."

"I do, indeed, know the truth," said Mr. Lavington: "it is that which so pains me; since I feel that, to act as it is my duty to do, I must, as far as in me lies, exert all my influence with you, and influence I ought to have with you, though I shall never go beyond it, to oppose your union with one utterly unworthy of you. I allude to Mr. Sydney Maynard."

Miss Fountaine looked down, blushed, and said—"Sir, I fear you have been prejudiced in your opinion by my poor grandfather."

"No, madam, I have not," replied Mr. Lavington. "I have not been prejudiced even by my own feelings towards you. They would, I confess it, once have had some weight. But my opinions respecting that gentleman would never have been intruded on you had not Mr. Sydney Maynard yesterday waited on me as your guardian."

Betsy started, and looked confused.

Mr. Lavington continued—"I drew from him more, in the course of conversation, than you, perhaps, would altogether have approved; and, as I did draw it from him, I tell you I did so, that I may be just to him, even whilst I condemn him."

Again he paused; when Betsy said, somewhat impatiently, "Pray, sir, go on."

"I drew from him, then, the confession," said Mr. Lavington, "that, very soon after your poor grandfather's death, he had prevailed with you to engage yourself to him; and that the young lady who is now your guest was endeavouring to induce you to shorten the time of your mourning for your grandfather in order that you might marry him. I am sorry you have so ill an adviser of your own sex near you, Miss Fountaine. But I thank Mr. Sydney Maynard for allowing me to learn the truth. Need I add, that he came to me, as the principal acting guardian in this matter, to ask my consent to your marriage. But I hope you will not insist on my giving it."

Betsy could not look up; yet she ventured to say—"You, sir, already know my feelings: I need say no more, in answer to your question."

"I would not wish to pain your delicacy, Miss Fountaine," he replied; "could I avoid it, believe me, I would not. I do, indeed, know your feelings, and, knowing, grieve for them. But how shall I speak, so as to gain full credit with you that I act from no mean, no jealous, no selfish motive, but only for your good?"

"Sir," said Betsy, with warmth, "you need say nothing to convince me of your integrity; that you are above all those little feelings that sway the actions of half mankind. Your generosity towards me, in sacrificing your own happiness to secure mine, when it was so completely in your power, is warrant enough for your honour, under any circumstances that can arise between us."

A deep blush overspread the face of Mr. Lavington as he

replied—" I thank you, madam, much thank you, for doing this justice to my character. Your confidence in it I hope you may never find abused. O, Miss Fountaine!—do not think me unkind, or harsh, because I would oppose your wishes; but indeed this man is unworthy of you."

" You are prejudiced, sir," she repeated.

" Indeed, I am not," said Mr. Lavington. " Dear as you have been—nay, why should I not confess the truth?—dear as you are still, and must ever be to me, though with the loss of you I have lost every hope of future happiness—yet, could I but see you fix your affections on an object worthy of you, I might find consolation. Had the man you prefer but worth enough in himself to be able to appreciate your merits, would he but love and cherish those sweet perfections, as, I think, I could have loved and cherished them; were he one in whose integrity and strength of character I could have felt some confidence—in such a case, though to see you united to another must and would convey to this heart a pang worse than death, yet would I have joined your hands, and blessed God to think I had been left as the guardian of your happiness!"

" How good, how generous you are!" said Betsy, deeply touched by the tone, the look, the sincerity with which these words were spoken. " O, my kind, my excellent guardian, and why should it not be so now?"

" No," said Mr. Lavington, as he shook his head; " I am convinced Sydney Maynard seeks you principally on account of your fortune. That he cannot do other than admire you, I admit; for who did other, indeed, would be less than a man. But I will not say he loves you, as I am convinced he loves himself too much to feel love for another. I am convinced fortune is his object, and that alone."

Betsy looked exceedingly distressed, and hesitated as she replied, " From any other than yourself, I should reject such a suspicion with contempt. But you, Mr. Lavington, have so much sense, you act so much on principle, on honour, that to hear this from you is very shocking. May I ask, what makes you think this?"

" You have a right to ask it, and to be satisfied," said Mr. Lavington; " although it is impossible I can repeat to you the thousand little circumstances, independent of the general character of the man, that have made me come to this conclusion. But this I can assure you, that when Mr. Maynard

found that if you married without my consent he could have no hopes of your fortune, he solicited me with a vehemence, I grant, but with a meanness of spirit, an abject entreaty, that filled me with indignation. A man of so mean a spirit can never be capable of a disinterested affection for you or for any woman. I will not believe it."

Betsy wept bitterly. It was evident what her guardian urged upon her consideration had produced a very strong effect on her mind. Her opinion of Maynard was shaken; and Mr. Lavington so far prevailed that she was on the point of giving her consent to his proposal, that he should be allowed some time to put the character of Maynard yet further to the test; when most unexpectedly Miss Arlington entered the room. Her guardian was about to give her a caution not to trust her fashionable friend with a knowledge of what had just passed when Betsy, whose conduct was ever as frank as her feelings were strong, in the extremity of her distress and anxiety at the moment, exclaimed—

"O, Miss Arlington, how much have you and I both been deceived! My kind guardian here is come to warn me that Sydney Maynard meanly sues to him, and seeks me only for my fortune."

"Upon my word, sir," said Miss Arlington, turning towards Mr. Lavington (whom she had not seen above two or three times) in a bold and unabashed manner, "Mr. Sydney Maynard seek Miss Fountaine for her fortune! Mr. Maynard is my particular friend—I know all his feelings; his inmost soul is laid bare before me; he has a thousand times assured me, with an ardour which could not be mistaken, that, had Miss Fountaine not a shilling in the world, he should think himself blest in her hand. I am convinced nothing could please him more than the loss of her inheritance, did it but give him an opportunity to prove the sincerity of his love. Sir, no generous mind will hear the absent traduced and remain silent. I hope Miss Fountaine will treat such cruel prejudices as they deserve to be treated."

Mr. Lavington looked astonished. Fashionable airs and assurance in a young lady were quite new to him; he scarcely knew how to meet them. But, before he could frame an answer, the parlour door opened and in walked Squire Dickons, booted and spurred, with a switch in his hand, very dusty, and seeming as if just come from a journey. He kissed his god-daughter Betsy very affectionately, inquired

after her health, then turned to Mr. Lavington and asked if he were not come, as usual, rather behind time. "But it's no great matter," he added aloud, "if I am, because I take it for granted it has given him but the more time to show you, Miss Betsy, why we, the guardians, don't approve that fortune-hunting parson for you."

"Sir," said Miss Arlington, tossing her head and opening and shutting her fan with a rap, "if you mean to designate Mr. Sydney Maynard by that mode of speaking, I would thank you to use more delicacy in your expressions. Mr. Maynard, sir, is my friend."

"And who the devil are you?" said Squire Dickons, with the most unceremonious look of contempt; "I never saw you before in all my days. But, whoever you may be, I think the business in hand of Miss Fountaine's marriage must more concern her guardians than it can you ——"

"Sir," said Miss Arlington, breaking in upon Squire Dickons's speech, "sir, you are mistaken; you are not aware of the friendship that subsists between Miss Fountaine and myself. We are indeed as one soul. All her feelings, all her affairs, do and must interest me as much as they do herself."

Squire Dickons gave one of those long whistles that always issued from his lips whenever he was overcome with sudden wonder and surprise. "Why, what's all this?" he said; "I can't understand it. Excuse me, madam, but aren't you a little crack-brained? You and she one! ma'am, you are no more like Miss Betsy Fountaine than my old broken-winded mare is like the young one that is her foal."

"Sir," said Miss Arlington, exceedingly offended, "I do not understand this. You may be jesting, sir; but I am not accustomed to such breeding."

"Breeding is a very serious thing with us all," said Squire Dickons, "and it is a thing that every man looks to, in the first place, when he buys a horse. And it happens to be the very sort of thing that we, the guardians of this young lady, have been looking into about your friend, ma'am, Mr. Sydney Maynard; and we have come to the conclusion, on pretty good grounds, that the gentleman's breeding has been in the school of deceit; that he is not worth a shilling himself; and that Miss Betsy Fountaine is not the first heiress for whom he has started; though he has, two or three times, been distanced by the officers of the Exeter militia, more particularly when he was on the course for Miss Patty Goldencup, heiress

to old Goldencup, the silversmith and money-lender; and so, ma'am, Mr. Lavington and I are determined Miss Betsy shall not fall a prey to him if we can help it. I shall take an opportunity to let Mr. Maynard know as much the next time he comes to this house, and I shall come a little oftener now I am returned home than I have done of late for that purpose."

"We shall be glad to see you at this house, sir," said Miss Arlington, "whenever you come, and can conduct yourself as Miss Fountaine's guardian should do."

"The devil you will!" said Squire Dickons; "and what have you to do with Miss Fountaine's house that you should be glad to see me or not in it? She hasn't made you the mistress of it, I trow, that you take upon yourself with these airs!"

Betsy, seeing a quarrel likely to arise between her friend and the Squire, interfered to pacify both, whilst Squire Dickons sat beating his boot with his switch, and whistling the air of

"O! 'tis the plague of man's life
To have an obstinate daughter,"

from the "Beggar's Opera," [illegible]en just come out and in high vogue. Every one felt discomposed and awkward in the presence of the others. Something Mr. Lavington had still to say in private, and he ventured to intimate as much to Betsy in a low under-tone as she drew near him in returning to her seat. She was not sorry to have an excuse for breaking up a meeting in which spirits so rude and so opposite were brought in angry contact with each other. She therefore whispered to her friend, who instantly arose, and, bowing haughtily, withdrew in silence.

"And pray, Miss Fountaine, who may that lady be?" said Squire Dickons. "I think I never saw a prouder wench in all my life, and very fond of having a finger in everybody's pie, or I am much mistaken."

"Miss Arlington, my dear sir." said Betsy, "is a young lady of good family; and I assure you, though warm and hasty in temper, is one of the best friends I have in the world."

"I hope she may prove so to you, but, I can tell you, I doubt it," said the Squire. "That's a very poor sort of friendship that would lead you to mistrust the advice of

your guardians, and of older and wiser heads than your own. What her family may be I don't know; but what her fashions are, I can tell you—very ill ones. Mr. Lavington, did you not tell me that the pragmatical young fellow, Mr. Curate Maynard, confessed to you that the jade who but now left the room wanted Miss Fountaine to shorten the time of her mourning in order to get married?"

"I collected as much from Mr. Maynard," replied Mr. Lavington.

"Sir," said Betsy, "I can assure you that you do my friend injustice. She saw me low in spirits and declining in health, and thought the change would benefit me, and so urged it; that was the sole cause for her wishing me to shorten the days of my mourning. But I would not."

"I am glad to hear you had so much sense," said Squire Dickons; "and you may tell your friend from me, Miss Betsy, that nothing which shows any slight to the memory of your poor old grandfather would do good, either to your health or your heart. And so, for the present, I wish you a good morning, and a good riddance to Fountaine Hall of your fine lady friend. Carlo! Carlo! you and I, old fellow, are out of place here just now. Lavington, I shall call and see you in the afternoon." And so retreated Squire Dickons, highly displeased by the visit and the company he had found with his ward.

No sooner was he gone than Mr. Lavington said, "Indeed, my dear Miss Fountaine, the Squire speaks truth, though in a rough way. I do not think the lady so desirable a companion as I could have wished for you. But I have no right to interfere with your friendships, and I will not."

"Indeed, sir, if you knew Miss Arlington," said Betsy, "you would think differently of her, though I grant she is often too warm and inconsiderate; but I can assure you she means well."

"I hope she does," replied Mr. Lavington, "and that she will not mislead you. But be on your guard, for you are young and inexperienced; and, with your confiding spirit, a faithless female friend might prove fatal to your peace."

"Believe me, there is nothing to fear," said Betsy. "Mr. Lavington, pardon me if I say you are too ready to look on the friends of my choice with a severity of judgment I must lament."

"I have only a few words to add," said Mr. Lavington,

"and then I am gone." He paused, came up to Betsy, took her hand within his and pressed it respectfully but fervently to his lips. "Your happiness," he continued, "is and must be my first object. Think, then, of all I have said when I shall have left you; do not decide hastily. Remember the step you contemplate is for life; once taken, there is no retreating—it is worth a pause before it is taken. Reflect on what I have advised; examine for yourself—dispassionately examine; and I cannot but think you will find that what I have said of Mr. Sydney Maynard is truth."

Again he paused, as if awaiting Betsy's reply. But she looked down and maintained a silence Mr. Lavington was grieved to see at such a moment. "Well," said he, "if, after all, nothing I can say will prevail with you—if your happiness is really at stake, you will have nothing to fear from me. But think not I can ever stand by to see the sacrifice completed. No, Miss Fountaine; the hour that gives you to Mr. Maynard will take for ever from your sight the guardian who loves you but too well, and whose presence could no longer be desirable to you. If you wed Maynard I shall leave this country—leave England, I hope, never more to return; and may God bless you, and give you that happiness which I dare not anticipate for you with such a man!"

Mr. Lavington spoke the last words with so much emotion that he dared trust himself no longer in the presence of Miss Fountaine: he snatched up his hat, and in another minute left the house.

CHAPTER XX.

Nought can to peace this busy female charm,
And if she can't do good she must do harm.
G. LAMB.

For women born to be controll'd
Stoop to the forward and the bold.
WALLER.

HAD Miss Betsy Fountaine been left to her own reflections, or had she consulted no one but Hannah on the subject of Mr. Lavington's advice, I have no doubt the engagement into which she had so imprudently entered would have ended.

But, as it was, Miss Arlington was at hand, and she could not have sought a worse counsellor; since, although Betsy was not blind to her faults, and even blamed the manner in which she had interfered with her guardians, the firm belief she cherished that all arose solely from the ardour of an over-zealous friendship excused everything, and Miss Arlington's advice and opinions were as much as ever respected and adopted.

To treat as briefly as possible this painful part of my narrative, I shall only state, that, although Hannah did what she could to prevail with Betsy Fountaine to follow the wishes of her guardians, Miss Arlington rendered all she said fruitless, in a manner so insidious that, whilst she overruled all Betsy's better resolves, whatever the unhappy girl did seemed to be but the result of her own more calm convictions.

Squire Dickons, whose natural shrewdness had enabled him to see through the hollow pretensions of the fine lady at a glance, was detested by Miss Arlington. And Mr. Lavington, who evidently disliked and suspected her, she feared. Proud and little minds feel a malicious pleasure in thwarting the views of those who have offended them; and when by direct means they cannot reach them they will not scruple to employ the most indirect to effect their object.

Miss Arlington was of this temper: she could not personally reach either Squire Dickons or Mr. Lavington in any way to injure them; but she felt she could annoy both, and one most seriously, by thwarting their plans in respect to their ward. Restrained by no good principles, she determined, therefore, to make Betsy Fountaine her instrument of petty malice, by urging her on to act in direct opposition to their will. She lost no occasion of setting the conduct of her guardians before her in the most odious and even suspicious point of view.

These abominable practices answered the end they were intended to effect on Betsy Fountaine. Her Sydney continued to pay her the most devoted attentions, and to study in every way to make himself amiable in her sight, and necessary to her happiness, for he seemed to live but for her. She was completely ensnared, and determined to marry him, in spite of all advice or opposition. Her guardians, neither of whom had been much with her of late, because Miss Arlington always intruded when they called, knew little of

what was going on; and Betsy appeared to be more than ever devoted to her friend, and to be solely guided by her wishes. At length, seeing all their opposition would be fruitless, those worthy guardians gradually withdrew it, and yielded an unwilling and cheerless consent to a marriage they had hitherto never ceased to reprobate for their ward. The preparations were ordered for the event, and we were all busied accordingly.

One day—I shall never forget it—Hannah and myself attended Miss Fountaine in her own room, to receive some instructions concerning the dinner that was to be spread on long tables in the park for the tenantry and the poor on the wedding-day.

As we entered, Miss Fountaine rose to salute Hannah, as she always did on seeing her for the first time in the day. We both noticed she looked very grave, and Hannah inquired if anything was the matter. She did not instantly answer, but after a moment's reflection said, "I will tell you, my dear Hannah, because I am sure you will not laugh at me; but I have had the most extraordinary dream, which has left so strong an impression on my mind that I cannot shake it off. Sit down both of you, and I will tell you what it was."

We obeyed her.

"Hannah," she continued, "you know the room in which my poor dear grandfather died. Well, I thought in my sleep that we were all there, even as on that sad occasion; and that my grandfather was sitting up in his chair, and looking earnestly at me in the most anxious manner. I fancied he wished to speak to me, and I rose up to go to him; when—I cannot tell you how he came into the room, for till that moment I had not seen him—Sydney stood between us with a naked sword in his hand; and, though I made every effort to go to him, I could not get near my poor grandfather, who looked distressed, and kept pointing towards the wall. I looked up, when the strangest sight met my view. The pictures that always hang in the oak parlour I now fancied were in my grandfather's room. They were the same, for I knew them instantly, yet they were changed. There was my grandmother's portrait, and my aunt Amy's, but the figures were dressed in deep mourning. There was my aunt Martha, but not in mourning; and I thought the picture looked alive! And, oh! where the vacant panel used to be in the oak parlour, and where, since

my poor grandfather's death, you have restored the portrait of my own mother, I now saw my own! It had on my bride-clothes, I thought; yes, the very brocade with silver flowers in which I am to be married; and when, as I fancied, I would call Sydney to look at it, my grandfather rose up and would have seized him, but, ere he could do so, Sydney raised the sword, as if to thrust it into the bosom of my portrait. As I rushed up to prevent the blow, the portraits, I thought, were in an instant changed—mine crumbled into dust, and Martha's stood fixed within the panel in its stead. I screamed with terror, and awoke cold and shuddering, and for some time could not persuade myself it was a dream, so actual, so real, did the shadows seem which passed before my fancy."

Hannah, who had great faith in her own dreams, was exceedingly shocked and distressed at the hearing of Miss Fountaine's vision of the night, more especially at the thought of Sydney Maynard and the sword. But Miss Betsy did not seem at all affected by that part of it. The thing which most dwelt on her mind was the recollection of her grandfather pointing so fixedly to the wall; the portraits of her grandmother and her aunt Amy being in black, but not her aunt Martha's, whose portrait seemed of itself to take the place of her own. After dwelling on these particulars, she said—

"Hannah, I am convinced there is more in this dream than mere accident. I know that dreams and visions of the night are often made the means by which in His providence the will of the Almighty is darkly and mysteriously shadowed out to man. My dream convinces me that it is God's pleasure thus to intimate to me that my aunt Martha is still alive; that the grand-daughter is not to step into the daughter's place. Nothing, nothing shall shake my purpose. The visitation of the dead, the claim of the living—for I am convinced my aunt Martha is living—shall be obeyed. I will not sign the settlements that have been drawn up for me. I will have others drawn of my own ordering, and they shall be so worded that, if my aunt Martha comes home, the heiress of the Fountaine family shall give place to her in the estate."

CHAPTER XXI.

Now am I marble constant.
Henceforth the waning moon no planet is of mine.
SHAKSPERE.

AFTER this declaration, the conduct of Miss Betsy Fountaine was as undeviatingly firm in purpose as it had before been weak and vacillating. No arguments, no persuasions, no reasonings as to the improbability of Martha's return, had the least weight with her. Neither the sneers of Miss Arlington, on the folly of being influenced by dreams, nor the assurances of Mr. Sydney Maynard, as a clergyman, that the frequent occurrences in the Old Testament of intimations of the divine will by dreams had ceased under the New, could shake her resolution. And although her guardians, never favouring too much Mr. Maynard, thought the clause she proposed quite unnecessary, as Martha was beyond all question dead, and had left no heirs, yet she would not hearken to them; and, with the true spirit of a Fountaine, declared her resolution was taken; and, unless the clause she proposed was inserted, neither thumbscrews, nor any other instruments of torture, should induce her to take up the pen to sign the parchments.

At length, Mr. Sheriff, who drew the writings, said it was useless to argue the point any more with Miss Fountaine, as she was so determined; and, as the clause could do no injury to the settlements in any respect (for there was not the slightest probability that any one would ever claim under it), it had better be inserted; it would but add a trifle to the length and expense of the deed. The marriage articles were drawn, therefore, as she directed.

The wedding-day was fixed for the 10th of June. On the 8th all the parties were to meet in Fountaine Hall in the forenoon, to make the last necessary arrangements, and to sign and seal the settlements. Squire Dickons and Mr. Lavington, as her guardians (Miss Fountaine being under age), were obliged to be present; their signatures being absolutely necessary. In those days the signing of marriage articles in a great family (always held to be a thing of importance) was attended with much state. A table of refreshments was spread in the great hall, the signing to take

place in the oak parlour, and the parties were to meet at noon.

Hannah and myself went to attend upon Miss Fountaine before she quitted her dressing-room. We found her busied in putting on a bracelet set with diamonds, in the centre of which was a miniature of her grandfather, when a young and a very handsome man. She looked grave, even thoughtful.

"Hannah," she said, "tell me, ought I to wear this to-day, or not? I cannot tell how it is, but something seems to whisper to me I ought not to place *his* picture on the hand that is about to sign marriage articles with a man whom I must ever feel regret to think he did not approve. But he did not know Sydney, Hannah, nor how truly good he is. And my poor grandfather was old, too, and suffering from the gout, and prejudiced, and would not give up an opinion once taken. You know, Hannah, we Fountaines are a determined race; and I do think I have in me something of the family spirit."

"Yours, no doubt, is a high spirit, my dear young lady," said Hannah; "and I hope sorrow or pain may never break it."

"But do you think I ought to wear this dear picture to-day or not?" she said, affectionately kissing the miniature; and then looking earnestly upon it she continued, "Yes, my dear father—for as a father you were to me—not my own father could be dearer to me, though in all things I could not obey you. But ingratitude has no place in my heart, and whilst I have life the memory of what I owed to you shall never depart from me. I should like to consider you present with me in every important act of my life, and more especially to-day."

"I am sure," said Hannah, "my dear young lady, that to-day, of all days, you ought to wear the picture of your grandfather, since you have so resolutely, so honourably stood up to defend the rights of his daughter, were she still alive to claim them. And, though she may never come back, yet the motives, the intentions on your part were not the less noble, because what you did was under a firm conviction that it would not be done in vain. I am sure to-day, when you sign such a deed, you may wear your grandfather's picture with a safe conscience."

"I will wear it, then," said Miss Betsy, "and thank you for telling me so, even as I would him; for you always knew his mind better than any one else."

She clasped the bracelet on her arm.

"And now, my dear young lady," said Hannah, "let me give you another pleasure; which is to tell you how well all the old people in the village speak of Mr. Sydney Maynard: they say he is good to poor folk, has not a bit of pride in him, and will sit down and talk with any old woman or any old man among them, just as he would with their betters."

"Now, that's my own dear Hannah, indeed!" said Betsy, throwing her arms round her neck and kissing her. "How kind in you to tell me any good you hear of Sydney, when my guardians have said so much against him, and want to persuade me he marries me only because I am the heiress of the Fountaine estate! But, Hannah, they don't know my dear Sydney as I know him, and as the poor know him. God bless him, dear fellow! I do love him, Hannah, and I am convinced he loves me, or I would not marry him for all the world. And I trust, in God's goodness, that we shall not only make each other happy, but many besides ourselves, and that ours may be a union in doing good."

"Indeed, I do not doubt it, my dear young lady," said Hannah. "And I pray to Heaven that you may both enjoy every blessing."

"Thank you, Hannah," said Miss Fountaine. "Well, I believe it is time for me to descend to the oak parlour. I see Mr. Lavington coming across the lawn. But, though he is in mourning for his father, I do not think he ought to have come in black to-day. It would but have been to change his coat for a few hours: nobody ever comes in mourning on a day like this. But how sad he looks! My poor, poor guardian!"

"Mr. Lavington is a very good man," said Hannah.

"O, an excellent man!" said Betsy. "How I wish I could but know how to show him any kindness, and yet not to hurt him; for I often do the one when I would only wish to do the other. Well, Hannah, we will go down. You must be present at the signing; and you have done me so much good, have given me so much comfort—for I dressed this morning, though I could not tell wherefore, in such low spirits, with such a weight, like lead, upon my heart, that I can never enough thank you."

CHAPTER XXII.

Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder?

Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall: and that should teach us
There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we may.

SHAKSPERE.

WHEN Miss Betsy Fountaine entered the oak parlour she found no one there but Mr. Lavington; he was standing near the chimney, and seemingly lost in thought. He started on seeing her; and for a moment surveyed her whole person, face, and figure with a look of admiration that had in it something almost of surprise. Her youth, her extreme beauty, her tasteful array, with all the exquisite order and neatness a pure white costume of the simplest kind can bestow, a delicate blush on her cheek, and a timidity of manner well suited to the occasion, altogether so much became her, that Mr. Lavington was struck by her surpassing loveliness. He thought he had never before seen it in such perfection as on that day, when he was about to put his hand to a parchment that must sign it away for ever from his hopes, if any hopes had unawares yet lingered in his bosom.

For a moment he gazed upon her in silent rapture; but the thought of her affection for another crossed his mind, and he sighed deeply as he turned aside his head, and grasped her hand with a kindly welcome. Betsy felt confused; she felt the awkwardness of silence at such a moment; and, eager to break it, yet not knowing what to say, she spoke the first words which presented themselves to her lips.

"It is kind in you, Mr. Lavington, to give me your company before the others arrive; and I shall be so much obliged if you will tell me any wishes you, as my guardian, may have formed for me respecting any of my affairs. I shall rejoice to fulfil them, and to do all I can to oblige you."

"I have formed no wishes for you, but that you may be happy, my dear Miss Fountaine," said Mr. Lavington, in a melancholy tone. "But I came to-day a little before the

rest, because, though it may be a weakness, I wished to take my leave of you when alone."

"Take leave of me when alone!" exclaimed Betsy. "O! Mr. Lavington, what do you mean? You will surely be present at——" She stopped, for an instinctive feeling of mercy checked her, and bade her forbear inflicting upon him the words, "*at my marriage.*"

He instantly replied—"No, Miss Fountaine, no! impossible! Do not ask it. I never can stand by to witness it—what you wish me."

And, seeming in these last moments to give way to that torrent of feeling which the over-charged heart could no longer keep in, he continued with a quick utterance, as his countenance too truly told the distress of his mind, "I could not witness your giving yourself to Sydney Maynard. Yet think not that I would retract what I have done. No; for your sake, and for yours alone, have I consented to what I have consented—against my wishes, against my convictions, against my better judgment. But, let it be a weakness or not, it shall be confessed to you. I could not bear the thoughts of your hatred, and that you should look on me as the obstacle to your happiness: and so I gave my consent."

"Believe me, sir," said Betsy, greatly agitated, "though I thought you prejudiced against Mr. Maynard, I have ever done justice to your kindness towards me as my guardian. I have always respected, esteemed you."

"Well," he said, "well, let me preserve that esteem still; the thought of it shall go with me into the exile for which I am preparing. I will lay the remembrance of it to my heart. You will not then forget me?"

"O, never, never!" said Betsy, greatly moved.

"This is the last time," continued Mr. Lavington, "that, in this world, we shall ever meet. After this day I shall see you no more."

He took her hand, and, for a moment or two, looked upon its white and slender fingers in silence. Then added, as if thinking aloud, "Oh! could this hand have been given to me, how I should have prized it beyond all other earthly gifts! But Heaven has willed it otherwise, and the will of Heaven be done! This, Miss Fountaine, is a last and solemn hour between us. Let it be one of the most perfect reconciliation."

"O, sir!" said Betsy, "how can *I* remember it with pleasure hereafter when you tell me it is to be the last time in

which I must ever hope to see you, my dear guardian. I have much to thank you for. Let me hope then, for your own sake—shall I say it? for my sake—that you will try to take comfort to your heart, and be happy. For do not think so ill of me as to fancy I could be at ease if I thought I had been the means of ruining the peace of one whom I so much value and regard."

Mr. Lavington was greatly affected. He again held her hand within both his own, fixed upon her an earnest and affectionate look, and was about to speak, when the door opened and in walked Miss Arlington. She said instantly, but whether playfully or satirically neither Betsy nor Mr. Lavington could determine—"O! Mr. Lavington, it is you! I declare I thought it was the bridegroom-elect. He is not far off, however—for see, here he comes with Mr. Wheatley—and look, yonder is Squire Dickons! Bless me, how gay he is with his sword and buckle-wig."

All the parties were now present. Mr. Maynard came in, smiling and looking happy. His behaviour on the occasion was quiet, gentlemanly, and decorous;—even Mr. Lavington saw in him nothing with which he could feel displeased; whilst with Miss Betsy the recollection of what Hannah had said, respecting the commendations of the poor, gave him an additional charm in her eyes.

Mr. Wheatley, the younger curate, was Mr. Maynard's double, and spoke, moved, and thought in exact imitation of his friend, who was to him a pattern in all things, from the fashion of his shoe-buckle to that of his sermon. Hannah and myself were stationed in the lower part of the room.

Squire Dickons, followed by Mr. Sheriff and his clerk, soon entered; the latter carrying a blue bag, from which he drew forth a bundle of parchments, tied together with pink tape, and laid them on the table, near a great silver standish, bearing on it the Fountaine arms. The lawyer spoke a few words to Miss Fountaine, and said something in an undertone to Mr. Lavington, and then took his seat before the table. Squire Dickons saluted Miss Fountaine, and, with his usual frank manner, shook her by the hand till her elbow ached with his heartiness. To Miss Arlington he gave a short "Good morning, ma'am;" to Maynard and Wheatley he deigned only a nod of the head, and a "Your servant, gentlemen;" whilst for Mr. Lavington he had a second shake of the hand in reserve, only second in warmth and duration to that he had already given his god-daughter.

After these salutations, all present were profoundly silent. Squire Dickons, who piqued himself on being a man of business, now approached the table. In walking hastily along, the sword, which was a very unusual appendage with him, got between his legs, and he stumbled forward. "Confound it!" he said, "I don't know what possessed me to hang such a thing as this by my side to-day," and so saying, unbuckled it, and laid it down upon the table. He now addressed a word to Mr. Sheriff and now to his clerk; and after a great many questions put, and answers given, on matters pertaining to legal forms, &c., he addressed himself to the parties principally concerned; and told them they must all attend, whilst Mr. Sheriff read over the document about to be signed, sealed, and witnessed.

The settlements were long, and occupied some time in the reading, though Mr. Sheriff got through them as fast as he could find breath to do so, in a low and continued tone, without pause or interruption; for the guardians had already read over the draft before it was engrossed. The business of the day now drew to its close. Squire Dickons, as the oldest guardian, signed first—slowly and with effort; his mouth compressed together, and his lips protruding or receding with the up-and-down strokes of the pen as he signed his name. Mr. Lavington signed next; he was perfectly calm, nor did he betray the least emotion, either in his countenance or his writing, for he had screwed his courage to the sticking-place, and was determined to go through the scene with becoming fortitude. Mr. Sydney Maynard signed in a rapid manner, with the same neat, small hand in which he made the entries in the parish register.

When it came to Miss Fountaine's turn, she paused a moment, blushed deeply, hesitated, and then said, "Before I put my name to this deed, I think it but justice to my guardians, to Mr. Sydney Maynard, and to myself, that I should be permitted to say a few words on some alterations in these parchments that are of my own suggestion. May I be permitted to speak?"

She looked at Mr. Lavington, who bowed. Squire Dickons looked, wondering and surprised. "Is there anything left out in the settlements," he said, "that Miss Fountaine would have in?"

Mr. Sheriff replied, he believed not.

"I don't know what she is driving at, then," said the

Squire, "but I suppose we shall get the sense of it by and by. Pray, Miss Fountaine, say on; but make your say as short as you can, for I don't know how it is, but this is no very cheerful business this morning."

"What I have to say will be soon spoken," said Betsy, "it is but this: to assure all present that the introduction of the clause in these marriage articles, which I insisted upon with so much anxiety, proceeded on my part from no distrust of the justice, the honour, the generosity of Mr. Sydney Maynard" (here Squire Dickons fidgeted in his chair, and began to drum upon the table with his fingers), "since I am convinced that if, after my marriage with Mr. Sydney Maynard, my aunt Martha, so long missing, and now said to be dead, did return, he would unite with me in surrendering to the rightful heir the Fountaine estate entire."

"Mr. Sydney Maynard could have no power to do so, without the consent of the guardians and trustees," said Mr. Sheriff.

"Pardon me, my dear sir," replied Miss Fountaine, "I am not now speaking of legal forms, but of Mr. Sydney Maynard's feelings of justice and honour; and I know they are in strict accordance with my own. I repeat it, from no doubt of his integrity, of his generosity, did I direct the clause in question to be inserted, but simply to satisfy my own conscience. I have received a conviction, it matters not how, that my aunt Martha is still living; nothing can shake the strong belief I entertain that such is the fact; and, while she is living, I never can be the rightful heiress of the Fountaine estate; for never would my grandfather have disinherited his own child to make way for his grandchild. In duty, in gratitude, in common honesty, then, I felt bound not to turn aside from the intimations of a Power higher than that of earth. And in these parchments, should the daughter of my grandsire ever more return, I have secured to her uninjured all her rights. Never, so long as I have sense or reason left, never shall a father's curse fall on my head, as the usurper of his daughter's rights. In signing these parchments, should my aunt Martha return, I sign away all claim as heiress to the estates and family of Fountaine; and gladly, therefore, do I sign them."

So saying she drew near the table, took up the pen, and signed several sheets of the settlements without agitation. Before she had reached the last page some slight sound as

from without was heard. Miss Fountaine paused, still held the pen suspended over the parchments—listened. The wheels of a carriage were now distinctly heard rolling up the avenue towards the house.

All present, they could not tell wherefore, seemed to expect something unusual from the circumstance. The carriage stopped in front of the hall. The door of it opened; the step was heard to fall; Miss Fountaine clasped her hands together, looked up and exclaimed, with almost hysterical emotion, "O God! I thank thee! She is come; it is Martha!"

Every one present became agitated; some kept their seats, others rose up; Hannah ran to Miss Fountaine, Squire Dickons to open the room-door; and Sydney Maynard, not knowing what he did in the confusion of the moment, seized hold of the sword that lay on the table.

"O Heaven!" said Miss Fountaine, turning to Hannah, who stood supporting her, "he has taken up the sword! Martha is come; the dream will not fail;" and in another instant she dropped senseless into Hannah's arms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture. They looked as if they had heard of a world ransomed or one destroyed. A notable passion of wonder appeared in them; but the wisest beholder, that knew no more but seeing, could not say if the importance were joy or sorrow; but in the extremity of the one it must needs be.

SHAKSPERE.

It would be impossible to describe the scene which followed on the entrance of a lady of a noble and majestic carriage, with a strong look of the Fountaine family in her countenance. Dressed in the mourning that spoke her widowhood, she came forward, leading by the hand a sweet, fair-haired boy of about five years old, also dressed in black, who gave a timid glance around him; and, at the sight of so many strange faces, clung but the more closely to the lady's side.

It was Martha and her only and fatherless child; now, after an absence of twenty years, returning, a widow and a

penitent, to a father no longer living to pronounce his forgiveness, or to welcome her home to that roof she had so heedlessly and unkindly abandoned in the days of her youth and folly. Now all was changed, yet nothing perhaps in so striking a manner as herself and her destiny. She as well as the child looked around, but something seemed missing—something the heart pined after with vain self-reproaches. She could not speak, but sank into a chair to which I led her, near that of my young mistress.

The swooning state of Miss Fountaine, which still continued, drew on her the general attention. Mr. Lavington was most active for her relief. No sooner was she restored to her senses than, seeing Martha bending over her with a kind and anxious expression of countenance, she threw her arms round her neck, wept aloud upon her bosom, and, looking upward, publicly and fervently thanked God that he had given her the opportunity of doing an act of justice to the daughter of her beloved grandfather. Martha fixed her eyes earnestly upon her, not comprehending the full import of what she said, and asked what it was she meant.

"O, my dear aunt!" she replied; "my grandfather believed you to be dead; he heard you were lost at sea with your only surviving child; and considering me, therefore, as heiress to the Fountaine estate, he left everything to me. Never, never would he have done so, had he not been fully persuaded you were dead. But you live, and your child lives also. In the sight of God and man you are the rightful heir; and to you I will restore what never could and never ought to be mine. And, oh! with what deep gratitude to Heaven must I ever acknowledge that merciful interference of a divine Providence, which, by a means so awful, so impressive, made known to me the truth. My dear aunt, why, why did you so long conceal from my poor grandfather and from us all that you were alive, when to know it would have been a balm to his heart, and would have soothed even his last hours?"

Martha wept bitterly—most bitterly. She wrung Betsy by the hand, but, like Miss Fountaine, was so much overcome that she could not, till some little time had elapsed, tell us the following particulars.

That, after the deaths of her husband and four of her children in the West Indies, she was returning home to throw herself at her father's feet, and beg his forgiveness for her-

self, and his blessing on her fatherless boy, when the vessel in which she was embarked foundered at sea in a fearful storm. The few passengers on board and part of the crew betook themselves to the boats. One boat only lived through the tempestuous waters. It was that in which were herself and her child. They were providentially saved by a homeward-bound vessel. On her arrival in England Mrs. Samford lost no time in turning her steps towards her old home. But, anxious to learn what she could ere she reached it, she had stopped a few hours at Exeter on her way. There she was informed her father was dead, and that his granddaughter, left sole heiress to the Fountaine estate, was on the eve of marriage.

These particulars were told in a few sentences. Mrs. Samford then took her child in her arms, and, placing him in those of Miss Fountaine, said, with great emotion, as a fresh flood of tears spoke even more than did her words the agitation of her spirits, "O, my dear niece! for so must I call you, let this boy thank you, for I am quite incapable of speaking my sense of your generosity in the act of justice which you have done him in so noble a manner. God will bless you for it—I cannot find words to thank you."

"My dear aunt," said Betsy, "what a blessing will your return be to me! I am in your house now, yet I feel confident that the kind friends who are here assembled on an important occasion of my life—and two of them are my most worthy and honoured guardians—will be welcome to you for my sake and the sake of your dear father, by whom they were so much valued and beloved. This gentleman is Mr. Lavington, one of my guardians, and this Squire Dickons."

Mr. Lavington bowed, and said a few words in his usual quiet manner. But Squire Dickons exclaimed, "No need to present me, Miss Betsy, to your aunt, Miss Martha—that is, I mean, Miss Martha that was—she and I are no strangers to one another, I promise you. And, though her hair is turned grayish, and she looks—as good reason she should in twenty years—a little older, yet I knew Miss Martha at once, as soon as ever the door opened. For, though a woman be neither young nor pretty, there's something in the look of a Fountaine that never wears out. I'm glad to see you, ma'am, once again alive and well in your old house, and your little boy there with you; there's my hand upon it that I am so, for all that's come and gone yet."

"You are generous, sir," said Martha.

"Never fear me, ma'am," replied the Squire. "I'm not the man to rake up old grievances; and we all sow our wild oats at one time or another, as you did yours in a way of your own. But you are now of a steady age; and I'm sorry to see you in widow's weeds, for I never had any grudge against Captain Samford—though certainly he jockeyed me completely about you. But no odds for that; the widow and the fatherless shall ever have my services. And so, Miss Martha—that is, I should say, Mrs. Samford—you may command me in any way to serve or to oblige you and that fine little chap there, who is as like his grandfather Fountaine as one pea is to another, as the saying is—a fine boy, indeed!"

Children and dogs never mistake their friends; they both seem to know them by instinct. It was so in the present case; for Mrs. Samford's shy boy, who shrank back and stood still blushing and hanging down his head in silence at the advance of every other person, made good friends with Squire Dickons in a very short time.

Mr. Sydney Maynard thought himself bound to say something polite, and he did so; but it was too refined for me; for, as I could not possibly understand whether he meant to welcome Mrs. Samford home or not, at the time he paid his compliments to her, I really do not remember the civil nothings he uttered. And I thought Mrs. Samford returned them with a good deal of the proud and distant manner of her father, which he always displayed when any one for whom he had conceived a dislike, or whom he did not fancy, offered him a civility.

Mr. Lavington spoke as a gentleman and a man of feeling, and said how happy he should be to become instrumental in doing whatever was right to benefit Mrs. Samford or her son. But it was Squire Dickons who came to the point. He said—

"I have been thinking that, now we have all told Miss Martha how glad we are to see her and her little one, we ought to go to business at once, and should come to some understanding about Miss Betsy Fountaine and Mr. Sydney Maynard, and the settlements. New ones, Mr. Sheriff, I suppose you will be of opinion must be drawn now?"

Mr. Sheriff conceived, under existing circumstances, it would be the most direct and the best course.

"Certainly," said Mr. Lavington; "as Miss Betsy Foun-

taine has declared her intention to surrender all her claims on the Fountaine estate, it is the best course. I am one of her guardians, and I do most fully concur in the equity and justice of the act, and admire the true greatness and generosity of spirit which Miss Fountaine has shown in making that surrender unconditional."

"I don't know," said Squire Dickons, scratching his head and considering: "I don't say but what I think Miss Betsy has done right in the surrender, as no honest woman would hold a grandfather's property when the daughter, that was dead and gone when he made the will, comes back again alive and well to fill her own natural place as a child. But though I, like Mr. Lavington, as one of the guardians, concur in the surrender, yet I think Miss Betsy ought to have bargained not to be called upon for arrears of receipts since she came into possession, and to be allowed all law expenses incurred, and to have something for herself; for, as to settlements, as Mr. Maynard has nothing he can call his own to settle on a wife or children in marriage—and he can't settle his curacy, I presume—I do not see, unless Miss Martha—I mean, Mrs. Samford—comes down with something handsome—why, I say, without this, I don't see that we have any property on either side to draw settlements about. What say you, Mr. Sheriff?"

Mr. Sheriff acquiesced by a shrug of the shoulders.

Here Martha interfered and declared that, although she conceived she ought, in justice to her son as well as to herself, to accept of the restoration of the estate, which her father gave to Miss Betsy Fountaine in consequence of believing his own daughter was dead, yet she should insist on her niece reserving for herself a large portion of the property.

"No, my dear aunt," said Betsy, "on that subject my mind is already made up. Exactly what my dear grandfather left me in his will, whilst he believed you to be living, will I take, and no more. Beyond that would be dishonesty on my part. Only a few days before my grandfather died he told me he should never have altered his will had he not learnt that his own daughter was dead, and her little boy also. I would ask Mr. Lavington—nay, both my guardians—if I could have a more specific direction how to act?"

Mr. Lavington gave his most full support to her opinion.

Squire Dickons said she was as honest a girl as ever broke

bread, and that he always said she would make a good use of the great Book he had given to her, as her godfather, when she was yet a child. But he (the Squire) would like to hear Mr. Sydney Maynard find his tongue on this occasion, and to hear him say that he rejoiced to think there was such an honest heart in the woman so soon to become his own.

Mr. Maynard heard all, but maintained a grave silence. He seemed to waken up, however, to something like a lively attention, when Miss Betsy Fountaine thus addressed him—

"Mr. Sydney Maynard, your silence, which surprises some, is perfectly understood by me. I see the delicate nature of your feelings on this occasion. You will not interfere; you will not say a word, lest it should be deemed to arise from a self-interested motive. Sydney, I will do you justice, in the face of all my friends, of my aunt, of my guardians. By taking the hand of the grand-daughter of Mr. Fountaine, with no more portion than five thousand pounds—for that was all my grandfather originally intended for me—you will prove your choice of Betsy Fountaine was the choice of affection alone, and wholly independent of her once presumed fortune as an heiress."

She held out her hand to Sydney, in the full confidence of the most fond and trusting affection, on the conclusion of a business of so much weight and interest.

Mr. Maynard took her proffered hand, pressed it to his lips, and said, very softly—"Can you doubt it?" or words to that effect; then let go her hand, and fell back into the place where he was before standing, near the table, talking aside to Miss Arlington and his brother curate, both of whom had played no other part than that of lookers-on in the previous scene.

Mr. Lavington turned towards Sydney Maynard, as he so speedily drew back, after the kiss of the hand and the speech of four words. I had my eyes fixed on him at the moment; the look he gave Sydney was one of the most indignant contempt.

As nothing more could be done on that day the company soon after broke up, not even Sydney staying to dinner.

Mrs. Samford had need of repose, and Miss Fountaine and Hannah devoted the rest of the day to her comfort.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show;
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.
SHAKSPERE.

MRS. SAMFORD had not been many days in the house before I observed traces of character in her that very much reminded me of her father. She had a good deal of Squire Fountaine's quick, shrewd observation, abundance of his pride, and the same short, arbitrary manner of answering persons to whom she took a dislike.

I had seen, from the first day they met, that Mrs. Samford did not fancy Sydney Maynard; and I as speedily saw Miss Arlington was not a young lady to her taste. They seemed to meet with a mutual feeling of antipathy; nothing but their being ladies, I am persuaded, hindered them from quarreling; for Miss Arlington piqued herself on her fashionable breeding; and Mrs. Samford was as proud of the old Fountaine blood in her veins, which kept her too high and too haughty to condescend to scold with a young woman she held to be so frivolous and so contemptible as Miss Arlington.

She would often tell her niece, to whom she became fondly attached, that Miss Arlington and Mr. Sydney Maynard were both common characters, and far more suited to each other, than he was to look up to one in every way so much above him as her "sweet Betsy."

It was impossible that such a state of feelings could do other than throw a good deal of disquiet and discomfort over the whole house. Things did not run smooth; and Miss Fountaine, who was ever amiable, tried so much to keep the peace between others, that her own suffered by her efforts. I was about this time called home to attend on my youngest boy, who had the scarlet fever; and for weeks I was prevented returning to the Hall; so that I saw not what was going on there; and can only relate that which I afterwards heard from Hannah, who, now that Mrs. Samford was in the house, was not so much as she had formerly been with Miss Betsy; and was, therefore, herself totally unacquainted with a good deal that happened previous to the events I shall so soon have to record.

It seems that the goodness, the sweetness, the gentleness of Miss Betsy Fountaine won on the heart of Mrs. Samford in such a manner that she went so far as to offer her the half of her property if she would break off the match with Sydney Maynard; always protesting she was quite sure he would be willing; and that he neither did nor could feel much affection for any one but himself. But poor Betsy had seen him in the earliest stage of her infatuation through the medium of her own ardent and romantic imagination. She had drawn an outline of manly perfection, had invested it with the sacred character connected with the Church, and believed Sydney was the original of this fancy picture of her own mind. She really and fondly loved him; and he was not without attractions;—a very handsome person, much gracefulness of manner, with a voice that Nature had made most melodious in its tones; and Betsy had possessed few opportunities of seeing other gentlemen of the higher and more accomplished class to compare with him to his disadvantage. Mr. Lavington had worth; but he was neither so handsome nor so graceful—nor had he ever so captivated her fancy as Sydney had done. Yet she was not happy; for, though her friends could not shake her love for him, her respect for them was sufficiently strong to make her feel uncomfortable under her sense of their dislike to his pretensions.

No sooner had Squire Dickons found out that his old sweetheart, Miss Martha (as he still called Mrs Samford), detested the smooth-tongued parson and the fine lady friend, than their mutual hatred of Sydney and Miss Arlington became a bond of love and forgiveness between them. They sympathised so completely in their abuse of these two persons that, emboldened and countenanced by one another, they sometimes carried it too far before Miss Fountaine. The result was unfavourable: for she, being of a truly generous mind, when she felt they were unjust to Sydney and her friend, did but show the more kindness to both, till, by the sympathy of her own heart with the injured, she thought better of their merits, and less of the sentiments of their detractors. In short, she loved Sydney and Miss Arlington more and more, in proportion as she felt her confidence in the opinions of her aunt and her godfather decrease. Yet, desirous to pay every respect to Mrs. Samford, and to make her as comfortable as she could, till the time arrived for yielding to her the supremacy of the house and household, she endeavoured to keep both the

obnoxious persons as much as she could out of her way, more especially Miss Arlington. Sydney she would often dismiss after a very short visit, pleading her busy preparations for resigning the house and property, on her approaching marriage, as her excuse; and Sydney, ever ready to oblige her and to comply with all her requests, and quite as ready when asked to go as to stay, never refused.

Whilst in-doors, Miss Arlington, who was not deficient in penetration, observed how disagreeable was her presence to Mrs. Samford, and often how much Miss Fountaine was embarrassed between her aunt and her friend. She, therefore, took the hint to keep out of the way as much as possible; and, from one excuse or another, would frequently retire into her own room, or ramble in the woods, and leave Mrs. Samford and her niece in the undisturbed enjoyment of each other's company.

During this period the draft of the new settlements was drawn, and everything went on towards the marriage. Mr. Lavington, who still adhered to his intentions to go abroad as early as he could contrive to leave the country, was, however, detained, not only by his duties as a guardian in regard to the deeds of resignation of Miss Fountaine's estate to her aunt, but by the care of his old and much attached patients, as the medical man who was to step into his place in the practice of the neighbourhood had not yet arrived from London. Many difficulties presented themselves in drawing the deeds of surrender, and, till the resignation of the estate had been completed, it was impossible Miss Betsy could be married. Then, when the deeds and settlements were drawn, Squire Dickons was absent, and without his signature nothing could be done. And on his return home Mr. Sydney Maynard was taken ill, and confined to his room for nearly three weeks with a severe attack of cold and fever. These were, I believe, all the ostensible causes assigned for the difficulties and unavoidable delays attending the proposed marriage of Miss Fountaine.

At the next scene of these extraordinary events I was myself present, for I had returned to the Hall as soon as I could leave my little boy for a few days after his convalescence: and my mother, Hannah, feeling the infirmities of years a good deal increase upon her, wished for my assistance in the housekeeping at a time of so much busy preparation.

The autumn had far advanced when the wedding-day was

at length fixed. Everything was to be arranged as before, only with this difference, that, as soon as the ceremony should be over, Mrs. Samford was to become mistress of the Hall, and to entertain the bridal-party at the dinner and the ball as her guests. She was not to go to church with them, but to remain at home, and bid them welcome to the old mansion immediately after the ceremony.

CHAPTER XXV.

What! gone without a word!
Ay, so true love should do; it cannot speak;
For truth hath better deeds than words to grace it.
SHAKSPERE.

THREE days before the one fixed for the wedding, Sydney, whose illness had of late kept him much away, came in the afternoon on some little matter of business that he had to arrange with Miss Fountaine. I forget what it was; but nothing of import. She was sitting with Mrs. Samford and myself in the oak parlour: we were making white favours by basketsfull, to be distributed among the tenantry, dependants, and servants, on the wedding-day. Mrs. Samford, however, was not working, only sitting and finding fault, as she had hitherto done, with everything connected with the approaching marriage; yet never for a moment shrinking from taking her part as the dispenser of hospitality on the occasion; nor even wishing Miss Fountaine to give Sydney up, after she had declared her resolution and her affections were unalterably fixed concerning him. But she neither liked the man nor the match, and that put her in an ill-humour with everything which had reference to either. It struck me, as Sydney entered, that he was very much altered in his appearance. Miss Fountaine's affection for him caused her to see it at a glance; but she attributed it to illness, and expressed her concern in the kindest and sweetest manner. Yet, I cannot tell how it was, but I thought Mr. Sydney did not look so ill as he did guilty. I thought there was a cast of shame in his countenance, yet I might be mistaken; for Mrs. Samford's fixed dislike of the man had made an impression even on me. I believe it is

impossible to be constantly near a person whose judgment and character one respects without imbibing some portion of their prejudices. I know I did so. Mrs. Samford had certainly made me suspect, if not dislike, Sydney; and yet I knew not any existing cause for suspicion.

To Miss Fountaine's kind expressions of concern about his health, Sydney answered with his usual smooth sentences and sweet tones, and used a great many words to express the fewest and most common-place ideas. I know not how it is that, in writing these memoirs, I cannot recollect I have written down more than a few words that were now and then spoken by Mr. Sydney Maynard. The truth is, I never seem to myself to remember *what* he said, though I can call to mind very well *how* he answered on many occasions: so much was there in him of manner; so little of sense, to make any impression on his hearers. His speeches were always too unmeaning, too frivolous, or too much fraught with indifference, to make it worth the slightest effort to retain them in the memory; and fix themselves there they would not. This must be my apology for giving so few of his speeches; though, I confess, a man's own tongue often better shows what he is than the most elaborate description.

Sydney sat down by Miss Fountaine, and commenced some slight talk with her, as he took up one of the white favours and played with it, not seeming to know very well what to do or say, after the business was ended upon which he came.

Mrs. Samford, who had been closely observing him, threw a keen glance upon his somewhat downcast face, as she said —"If I were a man, instead of a woman, Mr. Sydney Maynard, and wished to turn philosopher, like some of the wise men of old, I should unquestionably begin with begging you to give me a few lessons how I might obtain that imperturbable calm of temper you possess. I am not so fortunate in my own disposition; for I can neither meet great sorrows nor great joys with that happy ease, that air of indifference, with which you seem to treat them: or perhaps you may not be in possession of an almanack; you may not be aware this is the 19th of the month, and that on the 22nd is your wedding-day. I will venture to say that such a position as yours, with such a lovely, amiable girl, would turn the head, or at least rouse the spirits, of any other young gentleman

in the whole country, except yourself. Mr. Sydney Maynard, I must tell you, that you look more like a man going to be hanged than to be married, sir."

Mr. Sydney looked confused, and stammered out something, beginning with—"Madam, madam, you are hard upon me this afternoon:" and Miss Fountaine, who was exceedingly shocked, said—"My dear aunt, you forget that Sydney is but just risen from the bed of sickness: you cannot expect to see him other than serious; the more so as he is a clergyman, and marriage involves many duties: it is a serious thing to us both."

"The young gentleman seems to think it is so, indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Samford; "but I wish him joy upon it, most heartily; as of all things, I think, that is what he most stands in need of just now; and some expression of joy is usually expected in the bridegroom; though the bride, like the roses strewn in her path, may be allowed to have her cheeks bedewed with the tears of affectionate regret, on leaving her old friends for her new home. Pray, Mr. Sydney, do you mean to cry, instead of Miss Fountaine, at the wedding?"

Even I saw this was hitting the young man rather too hard; but Mrs. Samford hated him so much, that on no occasion would she spare him. I believe nothing could have disobliged her so much as to have told her anything of Sydney Maynard that would have compelled her to praise him. But she was a true Fountaine, very warm in her friendships, and unconquerable in her prejudices and dislikes of every kind.

Miss Fountaine, who observed that her aunt's bitter sarcasm had much hurt Mr. Sydney, made an effort to change the conversation; and, turning to me, said she had used up all the riband, and begged me to go to Miss Arlington for more, and to ask her to bring it herself to the oak parlour, as she wanted to talk to her.

Glad as Miss Fountaine herself could be to do anything to give a more agreeable turn to the conversation, I instantly obeyed. But I could not find Miss Arlington: she was not in her room; and, on inquiry, I learnt from her maid that the young lady had walked out more than an hour before, and was not yet returned. This report I speedily brought to the oak parlour. Mrs. Samford was not in a mood to let it pass.

"Pray, Mr. Sydney, did you meet Miss Arlington in your walk hither?" she said, "that all the joy you had intended for the meeting with Miss Fountaine was expended on her friend upon the road? Miss Arlington is a very sentimental young lady; have you been taking lessons of sentiment on the wayside, and are come to try their gloomy effects upon us?"

"Madam," replied Mr. Maynard, "I did not meet Miss Arlington on my way hither. But I see my presence is unwelcome to you this evening; and, as Miss Fountaine is engaged with you, I will take my leave, hoping, when I have next the honour of seeing you, I may be more fortunate in your judgment of my feelings."

"Sir," said Mrs. Samford, "my judgment, rest assured, will ever keep pace with your deserts. I wish you a very pleasant walk and a very good afternoon."

Mr. Sydney Maynard bowed to her with his usual grace, as she bent stiffly in return; he then slightly kissed the hand of Miss Fountaine, and retired precipitately, without speaking a word, seemingly greatly abashed and annoyed, I thought, by the open and severe attack Mrs. Samford had made upon him. Certainly there was altogether, both in manner and countenance, a change, an indifference about Mr. Sydney Maynard that none but Miss Fountaine, who would persist in setting it down to the score of recent illness, could pass without anxiety, without suspicion: even I had been struck with it.

No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Samford, who usually found fault with all he said or did, for the first half-hour after his visit remained profoundly silent and very thoughtful. Once or twice she looked at Betsy and sighed. But, whatever were her thoughts, she would not trust herself with the utterance of them under her present strong emotions, occasioned by the seeming, nay marked, indifference of Sydney Maynard.

Presently who should come across the lawn but Squire Dickons. He was whistling to his dogs as usual, and looked in great good humour. We could see him smile even in crossing the lawn, as he shook his whip at us by way of salutation.

No sooner had he entered than, after asking us all in our turns how we did, and very kindly telling us what we all knew—namely, that it was as fine an autumn afternoon as

ever came out of the heavens, he asked for Mrs. Samford's little boy, and we heard something squeak as the child came in. He then bade the urchin search in the very capacious pocket of his great-coat, in which he had on that day deposited something for his little friend's amusement. On searching the child lugged out by the ears a very fine spaniel pup, that made the little fellow laugh till the room rang again with the echo of his mirth. The Squire then told him this was to be his own puppy, and he had brought it for him as soon as it could be weaned from its mother.

The child gone, Squire Dickons had leisure to talk to the ladies; and, after passing a joke or two on the bride-favours, he all at once rubbed his hands, smiled, nodded, and winked, and gave many signs of intelligence, and then spoke aside to Mrs. Samford; but, like the *aside* of the players, quite loud enough to be heard by the audience.

"What do you think, Mrs. Samford, I saw in my way hither? Something that you will be as glad to hear of as I was to see it—she'll be shot of him yet" (winking, and nodding, and looking at Betsy); "she's too good for him by half. What will you wager me that those white ribands are not worn for Miss Arlington's wedding instead of Miss Fountaine's?"

Betsy worked on, blushed a little, but took no notice.

"What do you mean, my dear sir?" replied Mrs. Samford.

"Mean! Why neither more nor less than this—that I smelt a rat some time ago, but said nothing; kept my tongue within my teeth. But to-day as I came across the little wood, in my way hither, who should I spy in the cross walk, through the boles of the trees—Lovers' Walk, I call it—but young Parson Sydney and Miss Arlington, arm-in-arm together, walking and talking as thick as thieves; talking all in a whispering manner, like; and she looking down, and he looking at her in his coaxing way. I will bet a guinea I tell you the upshot of all this—it's true—I saw it all with my own eyes."

Betsy worked on, but now pricked her fingers, annoyed and vexed by this perpetual petty warfare and mis-construction carried on against her friend and Sydney Maynard on every occasion by Squire Dickons and her aunt.

"You do not mean what you say?" said Mrs. Samford, in reply to the Squire's information and remarks. "I should be so shocked, so grieved!" she continued, in a tone that

showed how much she was delighted with all she heard. "You surely cannot mean ——"

"It's a done thing, I tell you," said Squire Dickons, interrupting her—"I'm sure of it—he will marry Miss Arlington, and not our Betsy. Our Betsy has only five thousand pounds, and that fine lady has ten thousand; she is, therefore, twice as good as our Betsy in that gentleman's market. But I had a mind for a bit of fun, so I hissed, and set on the dogs, and disturbed them a little, and away scampered he one way and she another. It's not the first time I have disturbed the couples who bill and coo together in your old woods. Is it, Miss Fountaine?"

He addressed the last part of this speech to his god-daughter, as he saw well enough she had heard the former.

"My dear sir," said Betsy, "I really cannot answer you, but I know you love a joke."

"I am afraid you will find it no joke for you my dear," he replied kindly, "if you have set your heart on that puppy, Sydney Maynard; but I hope you may be shot of him, for all the settlements. Never mind that; it's no greal expense. I see you are a little vexed; but, come, kiss me, my dear, and I'll say no more, for I would not vex you for all the world. But, upon my life, you are much too good for him, and so do I fear you will find it to your cost; and as for Miss Arlington, why she is a precious cheat, all art and double face, or my name is not John Rideabout Dickons. I wish you would have Lavington, and then I should give you away with pleasure."

Although Betsy Fountaine tried to laugh off this discourse, and all the wild suspicions which her aunt and Squire Dickons endeavoured to put into her head, yet, almost unconsciously, it made some impression on her; for that night, as Hannah attended her whilst she was preparing for bed, to take some orders for the morrow, she kissed her; and, just before bidding her good night, said in a voice of strong emotion,

"O, Hannah! I don't know how it is, but I feel something here," laying her hand on her heart, "something most painful. Yes, I feel it—I fear it, but I cannot describe it. O, Hannah! I am not willing to give it words. But make your own observations; you know of whom I speak. I would fain believe that I am fanciful. But . . . but I cannot shake it off—God bless you! good night—I will try to sleep—but I shall not."

CHAPTER XXVI.

O, that a man might know
The end of this day's business, ere it came!
But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known.

SHAKSPERE.

Two days after these occurrences, and only one before the intended nuptials, Hannah was awakened very early by hearing Miss Fountaine, who slept in the next room, stirring. Fearful something might be the matter, as she had looked anxious and unwell ever since the conversation I have mentioned passed between herself and the young lady, she got up and went softly into her chamber.

To her extreme surprise, Hannah found Miss Fountaine up and dressed, with her bonnet on. She said she had not been able to sleep during the whole of the night; that she felt feverish and unrefreshed; the morning air was delightful, and she would take a stroll into the park, as she had often found the benefit of an early walk when she was oppressed with the headache.

Hannah looked at her earnestly and saw she had been weeping. "My dear Miss Fountaine," she said, "I fear something more is the matter than you tell me of. Has anything occurred to make you uneasy, or to distress you?"

"No, no," she replied, "do not question me now. But, perhaps, my dear Hannah, I have the heartache as well as the headache; yet, I will hope, without any serious cause, and that it will pass off again. At all events, I will try what the fresh air will do for me."

This was said in such a melancholy tone that Hannah did not much like to hear it from Miss Fountaine when so near her marriage; more especially as, although she could not tell exactly what it was, yet on the previous night she had observed something peculiar in her countenance and manner.

Be this as it may, Hannah made no remark, but offered to walk with her into the woods. On her saying, No, she would rather ramble in them alone, Hannah said no more.

Whilst tying on her bonnet, as she stood before the glass, she said,

"It seems to me that I am much altered of late. Do you see it?"

"You look delicate, my dear young lady," said Hannah; "but, if pale or rosy, there is no young lady in this country who can compare with you for loveliness."

"O, yes, there is one far more attractive than I am," she added, with a sigh, "and that is Miss Arlington."

"Miss Arlington!" exclaimed Hannah: "she cannot compare with you. Mrs. Samford truly says she is all artifice."

"Do you think so?" said Miss Fountaine. "I am sorry if it is true. But it is too late now for suspicion—this is all very foolish in me; Mr. Maynard will be here soon after breakfast. I will go and try to walk off this headache before breakfast-time."

"Don't go into the park, my dear Miss Fountaine," said Hannah; "for I heard last night from the gamekeeper that one of the deer is wild and very dangerous."

Miss Fountaine did not answer her but pointed to the window. "Do you see the church-tower yonder?"

"Surely so," Hannah replied.

"Well," said Miss Fountaine, "there lies my poor grandfather, and there lie the remains of my poor mother. My grandfather had her remains hurried to the grave, and at midnight—after he had pronounced a curse upon her head and upon myself, her then unborn child; it was a father's curse on a heavy sin! Hannah, I do not think such a curse was ever yet pronounced in vain, and on my head it will fall."

"My dearest young lady, do not indulge such dreadful thoughts. Hope for better things; trust in the protection of a good Providence."

"Have I deserved it, Hannah?" said Miss Fountaine; "I fear not. I fear the manner in which I have slighted the counsels of my friends is too much akin to my poor mother's sin of disobedience. Something here, Hannah" (she placed her hand on her heart), "something that will be heard seems to tell me, that to yonder church shall I be taken--not to the bridal, but to the burial."

"My dear young lady, this is terrible," said Hannah. "You are not well this morning. Shall I call your aunt?"

"No, no," she said; "I will go and try to walk it off. But, oh, Hannah!"—she paused, kissed her, looked earnestly into her eyes, as if she would convey all she thought, not by words, but by the sight, shook her head, and then added ab-

ruptly, "Have you forgotten my dream, that I told you of? Remember, *who* aimed at this bosom..... a sword!"

Without staying to hear a word in reply from Hannah, she parted from her, and hurried into the park.

Nine o'clock came, and she did not return. Half-past nine was the usual hour for breakfast ever since Mrs. Samford had been with us. Hannah grew uneasy, and was about to send out a servant to look for her, when Miss Fountaine came in. She met Hannah in the hall, and, saying she feared she was late, and had kept the breakfast waiting, but would be at the table in a short time to make the tea, asked who was down.

A footman, coming from the breakfast-parlour, said—"Only Mrs. Samford—she had but just before entered the room. Miss Arlington was not down yet."

"I am glad of it," she said; "then I shall be in good time." She left the room.

Hannah, pleased to see her look refreshed by the morning air, and to hear her speak so cheerfully, followed to give her assistance.

The bonnet removed, Miss Betsy was arranging her beautiful hair before the glass, when all at once she heard the bells of the village church strike up a merry peal.

"Bless me, Hannah!" said Miss Betsy, "the ringers have mistaken the day. What boy is that I see yonder, crossing the lawn, with a letter in his hand? Is it Squire Dickons's boy, or is it a stranger? He is coming to the hall door. Go and see what he wants. But, no, we are going through the hall; we will take the letter from him as we pass."

The hall door was open, the boy standing just within it. On seeing Miss Betsy Fountaine he seemed to know who she was, as he instantly took off his hat, and, coming forward, put the letter into her hand, as she set her foot on the last stair.

Hannah followed, and was near enough to see her turn very pale, as if something misgave her on opening the letter. Miss Fountaine held it with a trembling hand; she ran her eyes quickly over a few lines. A shriek, so shrill and piercing that it was heard by Mrs. Samford in the adjoining parlour and by nearly all who were in the house, burst from her lips; and, before even Hannah could give her assistance, she fell insensible as a corpse upon the floor.

The open letter lay by her side—Hannah snatched it up. Mrs. Samford, the servants, all the household ran into the

hall, fearing something dreadful had happened. As they raised their unfortunate mistress from the ground, Hannah cast a hurried glance at the contents of the letter which had produced such fearful effects. She read but a few lines, when she drew close to Mrs. Samford, and said, in a low voice—"Sydney Maynard and Miss Arlington are married this morning. Here is the heartless villain's letter."

Betsy Fountaine was removed to the sofa in the breakfast-parlour, and every means were applied to bring her to herself, whilst a servant was despatched for Mr. Lavington, who was on that very day to have left for the continent; as he had determined never to stay till the marriage rite should be performed. I neither can nor will dwell on the distressing scene that ensued.

Mr. Lavington came, but it was only to see Miss Fountaine recover from one fit to fall into another. During twenty-one days he never left the house for more than two or three hours together; as nearly the whole of that time the life of the unfortunate young lady was despaired of. A brain-fever had been brought on by the shock.

During the delirium of her fever, it was pitiable to hear her call on Sydney Maynard; sometimes chiding him, sometimes fancying him present, but always evincing for him the most artless and ardent affection. And then, in the feverish visions of her mental malady, she would frequently recal the dread she had ever entertained of her grandfather's curse, which, though denounced on her mother, she would say had fallen on her head.

The fever subsided, sense returned, but the state of exhaustion was fearful; the spirits had no power to rally. The medical men thought the constitution much shaken, and with her peculiarly susceptible lungs, delicate even when in health, they feared the consequences would be serious. The only hope they entertained was that, could she be induced to leave the country for some time, a complete change of air, scene, and circumstances, in a foreign land, might produce beneficial effects; by diverting the mind from perpetually dwelling on the painful associations her own home daily presented to her.

But soon was it apparent to us all that her heart was broken. Day by day she grew weaker and weaker; consumption came on with rapid strides; and the result, though uncertain in its date, was sure in its consequences. She still

looked lovely, though death was manifestly near. Her manner was perfectly quiet; she spoke little, and seemed often so much abstracted, that, if spoken to, she would start, and appear as if disturbed from the fixed contemplation of her own melancholy thoughts. She never uttered a word in reproach of any one, but would frequently sigh and weep bitterly; her excessive weakness rendering her daily more and more unequal to contend with her secret and mental anguish. I have sometimes seen her carried to bed in strong hysterics.

The good old rector, Parson Nixon, who returned from Bath to see her, in the hope to give her comfort, tried all the power of his eloquence to speak peace to her suffering mind, but in vain. She was evidently sinking.

The night before she died, feeling that her time grew short, she begged to see Hannah, Mrs. Samford, and Mr. Lavington together.

"A few hours more," she said, addressing them with the utmost composure, "and all your cares will be over for me; but you will not forget me; and I thank you all, and bless you, my dear friends, on my bed of death. I forgive my enemies, but God will not, unless they repent the cruel injuries they have done to me. Mr. Lavington, I charge you with a message to Sydney Maynard. When my poor grandfather was about to die, he had busy thoughts of what would befall me before the next autumn should be passed. Something of the same spirit is with me now; I charge you then, Mr. Lavington, to tell Sydney, that in these, the last solemn hours of my life, I feel some power more than of earth, a Power that will be heard, whisper to my soul that he will pine in misery, and before the fall of the next autumn leaf he will be, even as he made me, a tenant ready for the grave. Bid him, if he can, repent. To his wife I say nothing; let her own conscience punish her; that will not always be silent, though hardened enough now. My will is in yonder cabinet. Mr. Lavington, I have named you my executor; your task will be easily performed, for I have not much to leave; but, more just to your merits in death than I have been in life, nearly all I can call mine I have left to you. You will attend my remains to their last rest. This is the text I could wish to be chosen for my funeral sermon: 'Mine eye is foul with weeping, and over mine eyelids is the shadow of death.' Let me be buried in the family-vault. I am the last bearing the

name of Fountaine. Lay me by the side of my poor mother. A father's curse has been fulfilled. It has fallen on the head of the offending daughter and her child, but it cannot follow us to the grave. And now, O merciful Saviour, I am ready for thee and death!"

She sank back on her pillow completely exhausted. Miss Fountaine survived the night, however, and part of the next day; but for many hours she lay sensible, yet speechless. On the following even, as the clock struck seven, she expired without a groan; she slept herself, as it were, out of life; and, but that the watchful eye and ear of Mr. Lavington detected she had ceased to breathe, she might have been supposed to be still sleeping.

He stooped down, kissed her pale forehead and her marble lips, then spread her handkerchief, that was on the bed, over her face, and withdrew without shedding a tear or uttering another word.

The words which Miss Betsy Fountaine had prophetically spoken came true, for Sydney, disappointed in his pride and ashamed of his folly—for his wife had deceived him as to the amount of her fortune—fell into low spirits, became seriously ill, pined day by day, and even as it had been predicted (his own conscience probably acting as a spur to the prediction), before the fall of the next autumn leaf, was carried, unpitied and unwept, to an early grave.

For his wife, previous to her husband quitting the curacy, the poor would curse her and Sydney as they passed along. Miss Fountaine had been a generous benefactress to them in the days of her prosperity, and they would not pardon those who had brought her to an untimely end. That wife, when a widow, became doubly wretched; as it appeared that, at the time of his marriage, Sydney Maynard was deeply involved in debt; and by some artifice induced her to sign a paper, which gave her creditors a power over her property. The result was, she lost nearly all her own fortune; and, her pride humbled, though not broken, she became a miserable and ill-used dependant.

Hannah continued to reside at the Hall, but, the last who bore the name of Fountaine being gone, she seemed as if her proper place was no longer there. She died within twelve months after her beloved young mistress; and, by the especial desire of Mrs. Samford, was buried in the vault of the family she had so long and so faithfully served.

As for Squire Dickons, possessing one of those hearts which cannot live without an object to love and be kind to, he now turned all his thoughts to Mrs. Samford's little boy; gave up his time to him; and the little fellow grew so fond of his friend that he was never so happy or so well pleased as when riding the pony, or playing with the dogs, or hearkening to the instructions of Squire Dickons.

That worthy saw it himself; and observed that his mother saw it also with approbation. Many times did he scratch his head on considering the subject; and, remembering also how much their hatred in common towards Mr. Sydney Maynard and his wife had cemented their intimacy into the warmest friendship, the Squire at last wondered, in his own mind, whether or not Mrs. Samford might not have become wiser as a woman than she was as a girl. He thought that, one day, when he called at the Hall, he would put it to the proof.

How he managed it I do not know. But the little boy was present, and the spaniel puppy; and the Squire had his pockets well filled with gingerbread nuts, and all the party seemed very happy and well satisfied with each other.

The result was that, in a few months after, the church-bells again rang a merry peal; and the very Martha who, twenty years before, had run away from her father's house, because she would not have Squire Dickons, was now married to him in that church, and was never after heard to repent that she had at last taken the husband so long ago chosen for her by her father.

A DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE.

CHAPTER I.

Oh! if this were seen,
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue—
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.
SHAKSPERE.

You have so repeatedly asked me, my dear Paulina,* to relate to you the particulars of my early life, that I have determined not to lose the opportunity which an undisturbed leisure affords me of satisfying at once your curiosity and your friendship. Indeed, you have the strongest claim on my confidence, as you have so long acted towards me the part of an affectionate sister, through sorrows of such a nature that, but for the support of a good Providence, and the blessing of your generous sympathy, I must have sunk under their weight.

I was the only daughter, though not the only child, of Sir Arthur Mooren, who was, you are aware, a celebrated Royalist. My father was descended from the ancient family of De Mora, one of whose ancestors, having distinguished himself in the battle by which the Norman William became the Conqueror of this island, received from his leader a considerable portion of land, called Moor Town, where he built a castle on the borders of Dartmoor, from which he took the name of *De Mora*. In process of time this became corrupted into *Moorin*, or *Mooren*.

In the reign of King Henry the Eighth the head of the family was the learned Doctor John Mooren, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He was esteemed one of the greatest scholars of his age, and was the intimate friend of the unfortunate Sir Thomas More. He was designed for the Church,

* Paulina Grenville, of the family of Grenville, at Stowe, Cornwall.

but on account of his being, like the celebrated Chancellor, a zealous Roman Catholic and an enemy to the Reformation, he was obliged to turn his thoughts from divinity to the art of physic, in which he became very noted in his day. During his latter years he retired to his patrimonial estate on Dartmoor, and there he gave himself up to the calm pursuits of learning and science. He had a love of antiquities; and he found great scope for the indulgence of his taste in such matters by his vicinity to the druidical remains on the moor. The interest he felt in such researches, the quiet and retirement of the spot, and the disgust he had conceived at the changes in the whole frame of the Church, induced him to decide on ending his days at the place of his refuge, his ancient mansion of Moortown, which he much enlarged and improved; and there, till his death, he followed closely the pursuits of the scholar, the naturalist, and the antiquary. He was buried in Whitchurch, where all our family have been interred.

From this eminent man my father was descended in a direct line, and inherited the family mansion. He was twice married. I was the only child of his first union; my mother died when I was an infant. By his second marriage he had a son; but of all these matters I shall soon have to speak at large, so that here I will but add a few lines respecting the old dwelling, which, as you have only seen it since it was so much injured during the Civil Wars, will be new to you, and of interest to me also, who delight to dwell on the recollection of my birthplace and my early home.

Moortown was an ancient gothic mansion, displaying various periods in its architecture, from the many additions which the original building had from time to time received. Before it was partially destroyed during the Civil Wars the house, the inner courts, and the Paradise-garden, were all surrounded by a wall, and entered through a gatehouse. The mansion had a noble hall, a small chapel attached to it, more than one turreted tower, and many galleries and chambers. It was situated about two miles and a half from the town of Tavistock, on the outskirts of the Moor, and near the base of a lofty hill, which is crowned by the wild and rocky eminence of Pewtor, where the great antiquary of our family, Doctor Mooren, was convinced he had found a druidical judgment-seat, and other vestiges of the aboriginal British priesthood.

Though our dwelling was on the borders of so bleak and

sterile a region as Dartmoor, yet, being situated under the heights of Pewtor, it was not so much exposed to the cold and the winds as are some of the valleys of the Moor. We had a large garden, besides the smaller one above named, with several clumps and avenues of aged oaks. Remote and solitary, there was altogether an impressive character about the ancient mansion and its domain, calculated to call forth the day-dreams both of fancy and of feeling in an imaginative mind. The vastness and grandeur of the old Hall; its arched roof of dark and carved oak; the suits of armour so various, of so many successive generations, worn by De Mora himself, or by his descendants, even to my father's time, which hung on the walls; the well-stored library, and the still existing treasures of antiquity, collected by the learned doctor; the rich hangings and the tapestry, the old family pictures, and the beautiful little chapel, with its glowing window of stained glass, were all objects replete with interest; every one of which, even at this distant period, seems in memory dear to my heart, and to be numbered among the oldest of my silent friends.

And then, without the house, how much there was to excite and to attract my youthful fancy! The neighbouring heights of Pewtor; the extensive scenes which opened so majestically when viewed from their summits; some, commanding the whole range of the neighbouring Tors, wild and rock-crowned, that form the most characteristic features of the Moor, were truly magnificent; whilst, looking in the opposite direction towards the coast, the heights of Mount Edgcumbe, backed by the vast expanse of the Atlantic ocean, closed in, as it were, a scene of almost matchless beauty. Pewtor, from whence these enchanting objects may be viewed, was itself of great interest and curiosity. It consisted of vast rocks piled in horizontal strata, mass on mass; or standing grey and weather-beaten, like the impregnable towers of some ancient fortress. One vast piece of granite, which overhangs a smooth slab of rock beneath, Doctor Mooren had considered to be the projecting canopy over the Druid seat of judgment I have already mentioned; and the deep indented basins, cut in the living rock above, the vestiges of an idolatrous form of worship.

All these things, combined with the majestic scenes of nature, and the degree of mystery attached to the remains of an antiquity so remote as that of the British priesthood,

raised, in my young mind, whilst I contemplated them, feelings that partook at once of wonder and of awe.

Of my mother I know but little; for she died before I was two years old; yet what little I have heard of her has been always to her praise; she was indeed greatly beloved and esteemed for her piety and many virtues. Had she lived—had she been spared to watch over my infancy, and to form my mind and character by her fostering care, her prudent and affectionate example—how different might have been my lot! But regrets are useless—I will not indulge them—let me rather tell you all that hath been.

I must retrograde; must speak of persons as well as of events; or you can never understand the complication of evils by which I was surrounded, and the extreme difficulty I felt of steering the little bark of my youthful fortunes, so as to avoid running on a rock when I would save myself from a quicksand or a shoal.

You knew my stepmother—yet you did not know her; for you never saw her, where a woman is best known, in her every-day character, surrounded by the domestic circle, within the realm and rule of her own house. If you ever saw her there, it was not for more than a few hours in a large company; when her conversation and manners, like her person, were in full dress, garnished and decorated for the occasion, all satin and jewels, smooth and stately, fit for company; reserving for us, or rather for me (like the sad-coloured gown and mantle for every-day wear), all her ill-humour, sternness, and jealousy that would make but a poor figure with the world at large. But no more of complaints; I will try to make a long tale short: yet, as I before intimated, if you really desire to know *how* I was situated, you must learn to know the character of those persons who had so much power or influence over me; and, whilst they are pictured, the story must be somewhat suspended. You must, therefore, grant me as much patience as may be necessary to let me sketch, at least in outline, the principal actors of the piece.

My father's second marriage would, perhaps, have been fortunate for me (as I lost my own mother when so young), had he made his second choice with more prudence; or, even as it was, had the lady he married been a childless person. But he chose a widow, of better family than fortune, who brought with her one daughter, Dorothea Neville, the only

child of her first marriage. Dorothea was so poor that indeed she had nothing which could be called her own. She was the delight of her mother; and, in proportion as she loved her, she hated me; and seemed to look upon me as nothing less than a rival, who stood most offensively in the way of her darling in my father's estimation.

This was the beginning of our domestic bickerings and troubles; for my father was constantly reproached with making unkind distinctions between the children, and with spoiling me, if he did but show me the most common acts of parental indulgence. And, as unjust people ever seek to cast the blame of their own conduct on others, my stepmother would often pretend that her very crossness and severity to me were only assumed as a necessary curb to my over-forward spirit, in consequence of its being encouraged, as it was, by my father's foolish fondness. Yet, strange and contradictory as it may appear, this very stepmother, to gratify her pride, I suppose, as she was ever desirous to be held as the chief person by every one, expected from me the most unbounded duty and affection. In the midst of all this she had sense enough to know that those who become objects of perpetual fear to children cannot be very far from becoming objects of hatred also; so that, with a caprice that was the most unaccountable, she would at times be foolishly indulgent to me. I was often scolded without a cause, and as often petted without a cause; and this strange conduct, I am now persuaded, had the very worst effects on my disposition, for I was naturally open and affectionate. But, as I could trace no connection between my own conduct and the returns it met with, either for chastisement or kindness, and as I frequently fared worst when I behaved best, and was reprimanded when I frankly told the truth more than when I concealed it, it injured, in my infant mind, the reverence for what was truth, and destroyed the clear distinction between good and evil.

Neither my father nor my stepmother ever invited me to confide in them by any of the gentle inducements of consistent and condescending love. Alas! they knew not that there are minds which cannot speak their feelings but by the encouragement of affection. Such minds, when dealt with by a contrary treatment, are like the ice which becomes but more close, more hardened, by the bitter wind that blows

upon it; though it will melt and dissolve itself away before a warm air and an enlivening sun.

There were no such beams of encouragement for me; for, though my father loved me, he was too much in awe of his wife (and he constantly yielded to her for the sake of peace) to suffer himself to love me judiciously. Good fathers and fond fathers are very different things; and those parents, who make no allowance for the natural dispositions of a child, but have a set of rules, like a table of arithmetic, by which they calculate how to treat all characters and tempers in their discipline, will seldom mould a child to their wishes; more especially if the child has sense enough, as it grows up, to see their want of judgment.

My father, though often fond in his manner towards me, yet, as his fondness never extended itself so far as to interfere in my behalf to save me from injustice, did not engage my respect or my confidence as he should have done. I had not reliance enough on the strength or nature of his affection for me to fly to it as a refuge, as a protection. So that, if I concealed anything from my stepmother for fear of her, I equally concealed it from my father, because I feared him on her account, as she always obtained from him the knowledge of whatever she desired to know, and her suspicions never slumbered. Tyrannical tempers are always on the watch; their own conscience pronounces on them its verdict, that they deserve to be hated; and they punish themselves by the constant disquiet of a suspicious and exacting pride. Yet, because I make thus free in my remarks on the unfortunate weakness of Sir Arthur Mooren in respect to his second wife, you must not fancy that I did other than love him as a father. I loved him so well that, even at this distant period, it grieves me when I think how little we understood each other as I grew up; and most deeply do I still lament that I was not early trained to make my father my most trusted friend, more especially as I cannot recollect without admiring and revering them the many generous and honourable qualities which distinguished him as a man and a gentleman. But I must return to the days of my childhood.

Well, one circumstance happened in less than a year and a half after this second marriage which, it was to be hoped, would have improved my position in the family, by the new tie in blood that it brought to me as well as to the rest of the domestic circle. My father's second wife presented him with

a son and heir. There was now, therefore, one child who was my brother and a Mooren. There is something so endearing in every link of the family chain, that it was to be hoped, on an occasion such as this, Lady Mooren would feel its influence, and that the sister of her own son might find some favour, some claim, through him to a little more consideration, to a more kind and uniform treatment than she had hitherto found. I believe I should have felt the benefit of this new tie had it not been for the daughter of her first marriage.

I will not say that my faults lessened, or that I became better as I grew up; but I grew more cautious—more on my guard against giving offence—and more inveterate in my habits of concealment, excuse, and evasion, whenever there was a chance that any part of my conduct or my confidence could be turned against myself. Yet, in spite of all this, my natural disposition would often prevail; there were moments when the native candour of my mind defied all cautions and all fears, and I disdained to counterfeit, to conceal, or even to evade. But this was always an outbreak, not an effort, of the strong spirit within me, made in moments of high excitement, when the mind soars above all fear. But with me the long chilled and depressed heart would soon sink again, and, like a person sick of the ague, when the hot fit has gone off, and the cold one speedily comes on, *fear* would return again, with all its tremblings, in double force, because of the violence of the fever and the temporary intermission of its more ordinary symptoms.

Time rolled on: I had started up into womanhood, and my brother grew to man's estate, but there was little hope of his ever succeeding to the title and fortunes of the house of Mooren. He had inherited a sickly frame from his mother's family, and there was also a constitutional melancholy about him unfavourable to happiness, health, and life. Yet, with all these infirmities, both mental and bodily, he lived to reach the age of eighteen years. His preservation to that period was chiefly attributable, under Heaven, to the devoted affection and incessant care of a friend, a young gentleman to whom he was most warmly attached at college (where he had been entered at the age of thirteen*), and with whom he

* At the period of this narrative, young gentlemen frequently went to College as early as the age above stated; many went thither as to a school.

travelled abroad, in the hope to find health and spirits by foreign scenes and change.

My father, my stepmother, and myself, all felt the obligation that we owed to Edmund Oxenham (for so was my brother's friend called), and still more was the weight of this obligation enhanced on learning that Edmund had saved my poor brother's life when they were attacked by banditti in the mountains near Rome.* The shock occasioned by this affray, and some other trials and hardships to which the young travellers were exposed, certainly hastened my dear brother's end. He had long been in a declining state, and after this could not rally. His beloved friend, however (who was some years older than himself), conducted him in safety to England, and to Moortown, where he died soon after, in his fond father's arms, beseeching him with his last breath to love and cherish the friend to whom he had owed his life. My father promised all his son required of him, and hence arose the strong ties of gratitude by which Sir Arthur Mooren was bound to Edmund Oxenham.

When we first knew him, it was only as the younger son of an honourable and ancient family near South Tawton, in Devonshire. All the landed estates were entailed on the elder brother; Edmund's fortune, therefore, was very small. But he had the good luck to become a great favourite with the famous Duke of Buckingham, who looked upon him as a young gentleman of much promise; and doubted not, in process of time, that he would be fitted for the highest diplomatic employments, either abroad or at home. The duke, soon after, introduced him at court, and his Majesty King Charles the First, always disposed to favour whomsoever Buckingham favoured, was no less warm than the duke in his commendations of his young friend. No sooner were these things known, than all the courtiers looked on Edmund Oxenham as a made man; one who, in due course, might probably rise to great distinction. It was at this critical period that my stepmother, then much about the court (whither she had gone to introduce her daughter Dorothea, whilst I was left at home in Devonshire), seeing the rising fortunes of young Edmund, first set her mind on bringing

* At the above period the fiercest banditti lurked in the mountains near Rome, and elsewhere in Italy, and often murdered travellers on their way.

about a match between him and her darling daughter. The young lady, encouraged by these plans for her settlement in life, and charmed by the brilliant prospects of one who was so high in the favour of the sovereign and the favourite, pleased also with Edmund's fine person and his extraordinary merits, was well disposed to second her mother's views by every means within her power. Thus much I knew of the affair with certainty; what followed, I confess, became principally known to me by inference, collected from small circumstances and disjointed facts; but which, nevertheless, when carefully put together, formed, in my mind, a body of evidence that was at once clear and conclusive.

I was, as I have said, in Devonshire, whilst Lady Mooren and her daughter were in close attendance on the Queen and the court. Young Oxenham (as they said) at first gave countenance to the mother's wishes for the match; but, by Edmund's account of the affair, it would seem that, not suspecting that any particular views on their part existed towards himself, from a feeling of affectionate remembrance of his deceased friend, he treated both mother and daughter with a more than ordinary kindness and observance, when they so repeatedly threw themselves in his way; and that, at length, they chose to give a meaning to his attentions which it had never been his wish they should adopt. Painful as it was, he was compelled to give an explanation of his conduct, and to justify what he had done; hence arose a misunderstanding between them.

I remember, Paulina, that I once gave you some little insight into the motives of my stepmother's strange perverseness in this affair; yet, from a feeling of respect to her, I would not reveal, even to you, the whole truth. But, soon after that period, she broke all the feeble ties that remained between us; and, as she constantly misrepresented my conduct, not only to my father, but to others, in this matter, I feel I am justified, by the common right of self-defence, to speak the truth to one who will make a judicious and not a rash use of it.

Soon after this unpleasant affair, Edmund's patron, the Duke of Buckingham, being murdered at Portsmouth by the knife of the cruel Felton, all his high hopes and prospects were at once blighted; for, though the King showed the affection he bore to the memory of his favourite, by continuing to cherish all those the duke had most loved, yet his

Majesty's own affairs became speedily too much embarrassed to allow him to raise the fortunes of any one about him. Grateful, however, for past kindness, and ever faithful and loyal to his prince, Edmund Oxenham was among the first who afterwards devoted nearly the whole of their small means to the King, when Charles was so unhappily driven by his exigencies to raise loans (which he could never find means to repay) from his subjects and his friends.

This change of fortune, coupled with the previous cause for displeasure, at once put an end to all the plans and schemes of Lady Mooren in reference to Edmund; and, without having given any other offence than what had arisen from the unfortunate circumstances above-named, he became an object of the most inveterate hatred to both mother and daughter. His presence, however, was still tolerated in our family, on account of our former obligations to him and the dying injunctions of my poor brother; and these my father would never forget, though he was artfully, and, as it were, step by step, led to share in the prejudices Lady Mooren and Dorothea had conceived against the unhappy Edmund. No wonder it was so, for their ascendancy over my father had been the work of years, and was too deeply rooted to be now shaken. So matters stood with us when the events I have next to relate occurred.

CHAPTER II.

Silent and pensive, idle, restless, slow,
His home deserted for the lonely wood,
Tormented with a wound he could not know,
His, like all deep grief, plunged in solitude.
BYRON.

THOUGH I have told you what were the real feelings of Lady Mooren and her daughter towards Edmund Oxenham, yet you must not suppose that they were at all times displayed in open hostility, or even with that degree of harshness which would have rendered his visits at Moortown inconsistent with the respect he owed to himself as a gentleman. Edmund had an uncle who lived in the country, only two or three miles distant from our house, with whom he frequently

passed a good deal of his time, and when thus near us we often saw him. Whatever were the hidden feelings of my stepmother, when she found my father would not be prevailed with altogether to renounce Edmund, she so far mastered her aversion as to observe towards him that outward degree of civility which a person of his talents and station was entitled to receive, and, though there was nothing cordial in her manner, yet there was nothing decidedly rude; at this period, therefore, his visits might be said to be tolerated rather than encouraged. Such, however, were the amiability, the modesty, the spirit of forgiveness, the unpretending merit of Edmund, that at last it made some impression even on her stern nature. Indeed, she would sometimes talk to him as if she liked him, and when in a very good humour would even speak well of him to others. Yet, on the slightest hint from her daughter, or whenever a feeling of anger, prompted by a jealous recollection of Dorothea's slighted charms, arose in her mind, she would resent his former conduct, notwithstanding that, under the present circumstances of his fallen fortunes, she was the last person in the county who would have desired a union with him for her child.

For myself, I was at this period allowed as much freedom of conversation with Edmund as I chose to admit, and no check was placed on our often being in company together, playing the lute, singing in concert, or walking in the grounds, sometimes, indeed, without Dorothea; nor was it forbidden when Edmund would sit by my side and read aloud to me as I worked at my tapestry in the frame. That a youth who, like Edmund Oxenham, had been insensible to the charms of Dorothea should cast a thought on a creature so inferior as myself, was deemed too absurd to be within the range of possibility.

Forgive me, Paulina, if I am bitter in the repetition of these things. But I have been sorely injured by this stepmother and sister, and my wounds smart and sting anew at the very recollection of them. But I will not indulge in invective; let me rather continue my narrative, which will soon become sufficiently painful.

Edmund, though much at our house, could not but feel at times the very varying treatment he received from Lady Mooren and her daughter. But he allowed for whatever was harsh or painful, on the ground of the health and temper of

each having been much affected by the death of an only son and brother, and by his own supposed slights of both, after he had discovered their designs upon him, in the days of his brief prosperity at court. On all occasions, however, he endeavoured to conciliate them.

The first circumstance which, in some degree, produced a change in this order of things, was the state of public affairs. My father, as you well know, took a most active part in all measures set on foot for the service of the King; and Edmund greatly raised himself in Sir Arthur's estimation by the zeal and enthusiasm with which he espoused the cause of the unhappy Charles. I, in some sense, might be said to benefit by the public calamity; for it afforded to my stepmother and sister such a constant cause of alarm, they had less leisure to be jealous of me, and fixed their attention so much upon themselves, their immediate safety, their plans for future escape, or the concealment of their persons and their property, in case of any sudden danger in these most perilous times, that I was often entirely forgotten. Indeed, the very existence of so obnoxious a creature as myself seemed at this crisis a thing of no moment, when their own preservation became the subject of their cares. I was frequently left to sit or to walk alone with Edmund, if he chose to seek my company, without any fear of interruption.

Many would here smile, and expect the usual result of such an intimacy between two young persons of opposite sexes situated like ourselves. But they would be disappointed; for, although I most highly esteemed Edmund, my feelings were but like those of an affectionate sister to a kind brother. Indeed, he was to me as a second brother; and so I had been accustomed to consider him ever since I lost my own. The unkindness, the prejudices, the neglect with which I was treated by my own family, and the recluse manner in which I lived, made my heart yearn for an object of sympathy with my feelings. This very sense of loneliness, of wanting a friend to fill up the dreary vacuum in my life, caused me to be more alive to and grateful for the affectionate attentions of Edmund; yet I was not what the world calls in love with him; indeed, I was not. Much as I valued his many virtues, he was not, I think, of a character calculated to raise in my mind the feelings of which it was capable, the enthusiasm of the heart.

He was, it is true, young, handsome, and gifted; but there

were peculiarities in his disposition that did not harmonise with my own. I reverenced his sincerity; but then he carried it to such an extent as even to give pain by its bluntness, without sufficiently considering the feelings of another with whom he conversed; and this rough plainness was more especially reserved for those he loved best, and therefore wounded most; as if those whom he had the greatest cause to cherish were to be less spared and considered than strangers. Then, though he was the most acutely sensitive man I ever saw, his feelings being morbidly alive to pain of every description, yet his temper, unless when strongly moved, was calm and patient. He did not make a sufficient allowance for one whose enthusiasm or whose vivacity was more easily called forth than his own. And, though good and amiable in essentials, he wanted the minor estimable qualities that give so much lustre to the higher virtues. Edmund was like a jewel, of rare value in itself, but wanting the accompaniment of an elegant setting. He was, it must be confessed, sadly deficient in that charm which is so attractive, so irresistible, in the eyes of every woman who has imagination as well as feeling —he wanted grace. He had a cultivated mind, but not a graceful manner. I am convinced, Paulina, that our sex are more apt to be charmed by appearance than reality. The most estimable qualities will fail to captivate us if they are not adorned by what is winning. Whilst (alas for poor, weak woman that it should be so!) how many of us have chosen the man of a fascinating exterior, within which lurk selfishness and insincerity, in preference to a more worthy, but less accomplished rival! So much are our sex the willing dupes of whatever carries with it the appearance of elegance, or of strong emotion, when we fancy it indicates the existence of fervent love and devoted attachment.

You have often amused yourself, Paulina, with laughing at my habits of reflection, and have called me an old woman under a young face. But had you early tasted of such sadness as I have known, such unkindness, and had been left as much to yourself, you would not wonder that I found in solitude and reflection, by conversing with my own heart, some consolation for the want of that cheerful, communicative affection which, with the young and gay, banishes serious thought, and forbids the happy to be early old or early wise. To return to the subject.

Although I sometimes wished Edmund had been more

polished, less blunt, and a little more just to me (for he scrupled not, in our hours of intimacy, often to find fault with me, and frequently, as I thought, without due cause), yet I greatly valued him. So great was his sincerity, he could always be relied on. You would be sworn that he meant all he said, and never in any way exaggerated his feelings, never complimented; so that, superior as he was in judgment and intellect, a word of commendation from him was a thing to be proud of: it was as the verdict of truth, after the merits of the case had been weighed and established beyond all doubt. So much did I feel this, that my cheeks would glow when he praised me. I felt raised, encouraged, and saved from that heart-sinking despondency so often experienced by a susceptible mind when (as in my case) it is undervalued in the circle of its own home.

Neglected as I had been by my stepmother, who had taken no pains with my education, I was glad to avail myself of the instructions and assistance in my studies of such a person as Edmund, and with him I made some progress in the languages and the belles lettres. He taught with pleasure, what he considered he had found in me, a recipient mind; and I rejoiced to find in him a tutor who was also a brother and a friend.

Thus we went on together. Our growing intimacy was, I confess, not a little increased during the occasional absence of Lady Mooren and Dorothea, who, at the time of which I am now speaking, had frequent occasions for staying at Exeter on long visits to some rich relative from whom they had expectations. During these absences, when my father was much engaged or from home, Edmund and I were often for hours, and almost days, left alone together. And now it was (for you shall have all my confession) that I first began to think there was a feeling stronger than that of friendship for me beginning to spring up in the bosom of my instructor and my friend.

Women, you well know, Paulina, are the earliest to detect these things, and are seldom deceived when the affection is real, though they may sometimes be led away for awhile by what is feigned. I now remarked that, although Edmund conversed with me with perfect ease in the presence of my father, he was often disturbed, silent, or embarrassed when we were alone. His manner softened, and his voice so much so, that it seemed scarcely the same when he addressed me

in moments at all influenced by feeling. There was, too, a tenderness in his looks, in his least action, which spoke volumes.

I observed, likewise, although he conversed well and fluently in society, or with my father, yet it was on general subjects only, and that he reserved for me, as it were, those treasures of sentiment and thought which had reference to the heart. When I recollected the natural strength of his character, his reserve—his slowness in being moved to experience the influence of any passion, I could not but estimate the value of having raised in the heart of such a man an affection evidently so sincere; for he loved seemingly against his own will—the highest compliment a woman can receive. So evidently did he seek to struggle with, rather than to indulge, the new-born feeling.

I can truly say, though I was flattered by having inspired a passion so rarely seen in all its strength in a character so uncommon, yet I was sorry for its existence, because I felt it must and ought to separate us. And not only was I grieved to lose the kindness of the only friend I had in the world, but I was sorry also to lose the benefit I derived from him as my instructor. Yet I felt I could not respond to his love; and that his was not of a nature to rest satisfied with the returns of friendship. Honour told me that on the first occasion I ought to let him know the truth; for his sake, I almost wished he would afford me an opportunity of doing so, that I might at once remove from him all doubt.

But yet I dreaded it, because I looked upon it as the period that must put an end to our intimacy, unless, indeed, I could succeed in letting him know the real state of my affection, and bringing back his love into the first more calm and happy feeling of friendship. For this purpose I longed for his declaration, though I feared it. And every day the more I saw of his vainly-smothered passion, and of his distress, the more I felt it was due to honour, and to common humanity, to set his mind at rest.

Acting on this conviction, and seeing its melancholy increase, I took the first opportunity which presented itself to rally him on his dejection. But, finding that what I said did but add to his pain, I began to fear there was more in the cause of his distress than I had at first suspected, and I very seriously urged him to tell me, as his friend, what it was that had so changed him; but he still evaded giving

any direct answer to the question; and, soon after this conversation, I observed a new thing in his conduct towards me, that he became more cautious; he was evidently afraid lest his manner should betray the real state of his feelings, and I saw, by a thousand minute traits, that nothing now so much alarmed him as the fear of my detecting the truth.

The more I saw of this timidity, this distress, the more I felt grieved for the sufferer; and (shall I confess it?) the more was I induced to examine into the state of my own heart, which it was evident had now become of so much importance to another, and that other so worthy of the best I could give.

But this self-examination did not satisfy me. From unkindness, loneliness, and neglect I had long been habituated to inquire into my own feelings, frequently in order to ascertain if the ill-usage I met with from others was at all deserved. I was, therefore, more accustomed to lay bare motives and their effects than was usual with women of my age; hence was it, that I was not likely to err in respect to my own feelings. I was not likely to fancy a sisterly affection into a passion; nor to mistake the emotions of pity for those of love. I was convinced I did not love Edmund; yet he could not think more highly of me than I did of him. Indeed, my opinion of his merits was, I believe, much higher (no doubt with justice) than his of mine; for he often, even now, would find fault with me; and I never saw any fault in him, except that of a self-tormenting spirit, which is not content with real causes of pain, but will create them.

I had now a most difficult task to perform: that of soothing the suffering mind of Edmund, and yet so as not to give him hopes, such as I feared I could never realize. The line to be drawn was a very nice one; yet still one that should be marked: for, as I felt I was the cause of his disquietude, even so did I feel how much consideration was due to the heart that had received so deep a wound for my sake. So truly was I sensible of this, that I even tried to love Edmund, but something always told me that I did not; for, though I greatly esteemed him, I still felt his deficiencies of manner; I felt he wanted not virtues, but those nicer qualities I should have wished him to possess. This, then, was not love; for love feels no deficiencies of this sort, and is perfectly satisfied with its object.

CHAPTER III.

I cannot love him;
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of small estate, of fresh and stainless youth,
In voice well divulg'd, free, learn'd, and valiant,
And, in dimensions, and the shape of nature,
A gracious person; but yet I cannot love him.
He might have took his answer long ago.

SHAKSPERE.

THINGS were in the position I have described when my stepmother and sister returned home, after a longer absence than ordinary at Exeter. How it happened I cannot tell you; but it seems they now, for the first time, entertained some suspicions that Edmund looked on me with the eyes of affection. They did not as yet suspect me. But these suspicions concerning him very speedily produced in Lady Mooren and Dorothea an increase of malice and ill-will towards us both; and an entire disapprobation of any tie of this nature existing between us. For this there was some colour of reason; as Edmund was too poor to marry, and too well known as a Royalist to rise in any profession in such disaffected times. Had it been otherwise, the rankling feelings of both mother and daughter for old offences, and of settled dislike towards me, with an increased degree of jealous fear (lest we should marry with my father's consent) would have been quite enough to secure for us a thousand ill offices and every kind of opposition.

At present, as I was not suspected of any other offence than that of having pleased where my stepsister had failed to do so, Edmund was the object on which they principally combined to vent their malice and their spleen. I, however, was not altogether spared; yet I could bear it better; because my position in the family, in a great measure, compelled me to submission, even as a duty. But with him it was otherwise. Whatever he bore with was a sacrifice to love; no duty, no compulsion, could restrain; the way, therefore, was open to him for retreat, but he had not the courage to take it. The dissatisfaction of Lady Mooren and her daughter towards Edmund showed itself in every possible manner; by slights, unkindness, and even petty rudenesses; and the more patiently he bore them the more they laid upon him; some-

time reviling him behind his back for the very patience he exercised towards them, which was, with truth, attributed to the great love he had for me.

To see how ill he was used awoke in my mind an indignant sense of his injuries. I never could forget that Edmund had once been the preserver of my deceased brother's life. But, as I dared not openly and avowedly defend him, I endeavoured to soothe his mind, and to make up for the harshness and ingratitude he met with from others, by showing him greater kindness myself. This had a very injurious effect; for, the more he felt my kindness, the more he loved me. It did but rivet the more strongly the chain that bound him to me, and removed all scruples on his part for loving me, not only without but even contrary to the approbation of my stepmother. And, though I had a father also to be consulted, yet Edmund always felt, or fancied, that Sir Arthur would have no objections, save on the score of prudence, if he were not prejudiced against his suit by the ill offices of Lady Mooren and Dorothea.

As yet, indeed, Sir Arthur did not seem to suspect the truth; for, though a prejudiced man, he was not a suspicious one. There was a great deal of openness, of plain honesty, and candour in my father; so that he was ever ready to give those about him credit for a like candour towards himself. He believed, in general, whatever was told him, and saw no more than you chose he should see; so that he was not apt to be angry or suspicious. But, when his wife or Dorothea (who won an artful influence over his mind, principally by the violence of her temper) had worked on him to suit their own purposes, he was hasty, passionate, and determined; the more so, perhaps, because he suspected himself of occasional weakness. And, when he resolved he would not be weak, he was equally resolute that he would not be reasonable: for, alas! in moments of passion he did not reflect how great is the difference between acting on principle and acting on prejudice.

My father, as I observed, had no suspicions. During the absence of Lady Mooren and Dorothea, he had seen Edmund and myself walk together, sit and sing, or study together, and never saw anything more in all this than the simple and ostensible act in which we were engaged. For he did not reflect that in being together thus alone, even when silent, there is in the very reverie of the young, when of

opposite sexes, something dangerous; something to which the heart of either attaches a result of the tenderest kind. He did not consider how calculated are music and song to soften the feelings; that by the "concord of sweet sounds" even the sternest natures have been moved to drop a tear and to feel the impulse of pity and of love. My father did not suspect that Edmund loved, or that I pitied. Indeed, though in Edmund he was disposed to find a second son, he never thought of him for a son-in-law. His poverty alone (as my father was a prudent man in matters of marriage) would have been deemed an effectual bar to all notions of that nature, even had not a higher motive existed as a prohibition. This last was, that he would not, I am sure, have sanctioned any engagement which would be likely to interfere with the entire devotion of Edmund to the service of King Charles; since to live or to die for him, his persecuted master, was the great purpose he had at heart for his young friend; and, such being his views for him, it never once entered into Sir Arthur's head that Edmund could entertain any other for himself.

So the hours and days sped on with us during the absence of my stepmother and her daughter. The walk, the *tête-à-tête* with Edmund, under the shade of forest trees, surrounded by all the beauties and harmonies of nature, had in them an influence the most bewitching. Such an influence awakens the imagination, and predisposes it to the indulgence of the sweetest fancies; the fields and the woods are as the birthplace of love. But Lady Mooren and Dorothea returned; and then commenced all those most trying and painful events to which all that I have hitherto said has been but as the preface.

Although Edmund took great pains to conceal from the world the real state of his feelings, yet it was obvious to me that his distress of mind became more apparent to others as well as to myself. My father, however, truly believed (whilst Lady Mooren and Dorothea only affected to believe) the excuses he made for the dejection of his spirits, which he attributed to the disastrous state of public affairs. But I saw too clearly that a private source of sorrow, more corroding in its effects than any public grief, was preying on his heart. There were moments, likewise, when he expressed a more than ordinary impatience for action; and I could see he fancied that, though the Civil War, in daily

drawing nearer to us, would break the repose of the West, yet it would restore to him his own, in the tumult of the conflict.

It was about this period that a young Cavalier of repute became so intimate at our house as frequently to be with us for two or three weeks together. He distinguished me by much gentle and kind attention; and, as no one could know Sydney Godolphin, that gallant Royalist, without liking him, I never disguised how much I was pleased with his society, his friendship for us, and his devotion to the King. He was the son of one of the richest families in Cornwall; and was altogether such a person as no father would refuse for a daughter; yet was there nothing whatever in his attentions to me, nor in my regard for him, to excite jealousy. But Edmund feared a rival; and this fear caused him a degree of suffering he had never before known. I saw and pitied it; but, as he never spoke, and as I was not conscious of showing any particular kindness towards Godolphin, I knew not how to remove the cause of Edmund's disquietude without drawing on a confession which I now trembled but to think upon.

One day, whilst Godolphin was our guest, some of our party went on a visit in the neighbourhood. We stayed the night, and came home early on the morrow. Edmund was almost the first person I met in the hall on our return. I thought he looked ill, anxious, and, at times, seemed so distressed during the day, that his manner was confused and his words were often incoherent. In the evening, I had retired for awhile to my chamber; and was descending the great stairs of our house when, all at once, Edmund stood before me on the landing-place. I had not till that moment descried him, amid the shadows of the large old staircase, and the hall into which it led. He was pale as death. Every feature in his face bespoke the agitation of his mind, as with a low, deep voice, he said, whilst with a trembling hand he put a letter into mine, "*There is the secret*"—and, without waiting to hear one word in reply, rushed from me, passed down the stairs, and, by a side-door in the hall, made a precipitate retreat into the garden.

I immediately returned to my own chamber. My agitation, my distress—though from a different cause—were scarcely less than Edmund's. For some minutes I held the letter, unable to open it, unable to think, so confused was my mind

by the surprise, the suddenness of this event; for, though I had long expected, indeed desired, an avowal that might lead to an explanation between us, yet now that I felt assured it was made I trembled for the consequences. I sickened at the very thoughts of "*the secret*," as he had called that which was now committed to my trust, to my inexperienced judgment and discretion. I needed not to break the seal to tell me the contents. But I did break it, and, with a fearful misgiving as to the result, read a few but emphatic sentences, which (though I have no longer the original) I remember so well I can give you the copy.

"Convinced, Elizabeth, that I address one who would not willingly forget me as a friend, I will now disclose that secret you have so often importuned me to know, although in doing so I risk all that is dear to me in friendship. I have then, under its semblance, imbibed a passion which destroys my peace. I need not say who is its object, as I am convinced that in a thousand instances my feelings must have betrayed themselves to you, and must have told you how impossible it was that I could be near you without loving with the fondest the most devoted, affectiou. Indeed, I live but for you. Yet, if there is no hope, let me conjure you, by all the ties between friends, for ever to conceal in your bosom that I have dared to love, and forget the pains of one who will endeavour to bear his ill fate with fortitude and resignation. I would fly from you but for your father and the cause in which I am embarked. My honour binds me to him to the last. Indeed, the loss of Sir Arthur's friendship as well as of yours would be more than I could bear.

"These from your affectionate but most unhappy friend,
"EDMUND."

It would be impossible to describe to you the feelings with which I read this simply-worded but most emphatic letter. So great was my esteem, my reverence, my pity for the writer, that, before a thought of duty crossed my mind, I felt I would have given worlds, had I possessed them, to have been able to return the affection of such a heart. But I knew how nice, how acute, were Edmund's feelings —how delicate, how discerning—and that love such as his would be satisfied with nothing less than love. I dared not dissimulate. I dared not give a false hope,

yet my heart bled to wound his, as wound it I must if I spoke the truth, even though I should use the gentlest and kindest expressions. And then how to act for the future?—there was the difficulty. Knowing as I did the distress of his mind, and how impossible it was I could say that I felt for him more than a sisterly regard, would it be right to suffer him still to come to Moortown, where the object of his hopeless affection would be constantly before his eyes? For, young as I was, yet was I not altogether so inexperienced as to be ignorant of the common maxim that absence is the only cure for disappointed love.

I pondered on these and a thousand other things till I became bewildered, and could fix on no line of conduct for the best. How earnestly did I wish that there had been one human being to whom I could turn for advice or direction. Now it was that I felt the misery of my lone and almost unfriended state, for I had relatives but not friends.

As I held the letter in my hand I trembled, and my heart sunk within me at the very thoughts of what would be the displeasure—the vindictive displeasure—of my stepmother and Dorothea did they know of such a declaration from Edmund. Their fears would be up in arms; there would be no more rest nor peace for me, nor common courtesy towards him; and, worse than all, my poor father might be worked upon to adopt their prejudices, and the most fearful consequences might be the result. I was lost in apprehension; I knew not how or where the evil might end. Yet I knew my father to be naturally just, generous, and (when suffered to act by the impulse of his own right feelings) not unkind; but then he had so long given himself up, in all matters that had reference to me, to the guidance of his wife, that I dared not trust him.

Thus was I left to act alone. And now, in the first serious trial of my life, did I bitterly experience what it was to have contracted the ill habits of concealment. I was all fear—a very coward at the thoughts of an honest and ingenuous confession. And then Edmund had so earnestly prayed me, if there was no hope, that I would not reveal his unfortunate passion, that I knew not how to deny him what appeared so reasonable a request. I knew the delicacy of his feelings; that nice sense of self-respect which recoils from any familiar approach to its secrets on the part of another, in whom he was certain to find neither sympathy nor consideration.

How, then, could I decide to do other than keep his secret? This point once settled, all the rest required little deliberation, for, however painful it might be, I never paused for a moment in coming to a decision that he should know the truth, as far as respected my own heart. I would neither deceive him, nor suffer him to deceive himself; and, as he had nothing to hope from me, there was, I fancied, the less harm in my keeping his counsel.

In this frame of mind I left my chamber, and descended to the great parlour, where the family were assembled. There I met Edmund, for a door that led into the garden was now standing open; and, on seeing me, he returned to the house.

Never shall I forget my emotions at that moment; the struggle within my own breast at the thoughts of my father, my duty, my stepmother! My fears, my agitation were extreme; I could scarcely support myself.

CHAPTER IV.

I cannot love; to counterfeit is base,
And cruel too; dissembled love is like
The poison of perfumes, a killing sweetness.
SEWELL.

As Edmund entered, I looked up; our eyes met; they spoke our feelings—those of mutual distress, of dismay. He was at this moment, if possible, paler than when he gave me the letter. What he thought of my agitation I could not then conjecture; but it was so great, so apparent to all the company, that I was obliged to plead illness as my excuse, and soon after became so much worse I almost fainted.

My stepmother seemed surprised; Dorothea knew not what to make of it, and observed I had been very well all through the day; but she supposed there was something in the air that was infected, for Mr. Edmund Oxenham looked as if he also were about to faint; he was absolutely as white as a sheet.

Sydney Godolphin was present; at all times kind and good-natured, he saw something was amiss, and most opportunely came to our relief; drew Edmund aside, and, soon after, taking him by the arm, led him into the garden. I retired to my

chamber for the night, having had no opportunity to say more to Edmund than the words "*To-morrow.*" But he perfectly understood me, and that on the morrow he was to expect an answer to his letter, and one that would decide his fate.

On the morrow I wrote a few lines to Edmund, worded in the gentlest, the kindest manner; and, in order to spare his feelings as much as possible, and yet to convince him of my sympathy with his distress, I sought a favourable moment to give him the letter myself. He seemed by his countenance to anticipate its contents; and on his saying as he took it, "This, then, contains my fate! I fear I have nothing to hope," the gravity of my manner, though blended with kindness, was not calculated to dissipate his fears, or to reassure his sinking hopes.

"You will ever be dear to me as a brother," I said; "as my most valued friend."

"I feared as much," he replied; "well, then, I will submit."

"Read the letter," said I, "read it; and may God direct you for the best!" I retired, for I would not stay to pain him by witnessing the first pangs of his disappointment.

Soon after he joined me in the garden. He could scarcely speak, so great was his emotion; but, as I endeavoured to soothe his wounded spirit, he gradually regained some composure, and—ever amiable, even in the midst of his sufferings—his first words were to thank me for my candour, for not having suffered him to deceive himself, and for the kindness with which I had blunted the arrow of disappointment. He knew, he said, he was not worthy of me: yet he could not resist the influence being near me had over his feelings. He had loved in spite of himself—in the very face of difficulty, opposition, and almost despair. For even had I given him any cause to hope, years must probably have passed away before he dared propose his suit to my father. Indeed, he might never be able to propose it; as nothing but some change in his worldly fortunes—(and what change of a beneficial nature could he expect in such times?)—would ever have emboldened him to apply to Sir Arthur Mooren with the slightest hope of success. Yet, he added, his heart had so grown to me—he was so friendless, so utterly bereaved when absent from me, that he confessed he wanted courage to take the resolution to see me no more. And even if he took it, he did not know how he could keep that resolu-

tion, since the cause in which he had embarked with my father for the service of the King rendered his abandoning Moortown altogether impossible.

Under these circumstances he would, he said, try to master his feelings, to regulate them, to conquer passion, but cherish affection. He would endeavour to supply to me the place of the brother I had lost—one who had loved me so well—and who, he was sure, could he speak from the tomb, would commend him for such a purpose. He did not think the conquest he meditated over his own feelings impossible, though it would be difficult. Because, if hope were the nurse of love, now that all hope was extinguished within his breast, affection of a calm, of a gentle character would survive, when his blighted passion was no more; and a tenderness, quite consistent with friendship, would spring up in its place, with all the disinterested kindness, and the protective feeling of the sweetest brotherly love.

So passed our first interview after the explanation; I have but feebly attempted to describe it. I must not omit adding I promised to keep his secret, and that we pledged to each other, young and romantic as we both were, our mutual faith as friends—as brother and sister.

Alas! we were young and inexperienced; we had both yet to learn that friendship will not easily take root where passion has once possessed the ground. That ground has become too parched for a plant whose growth, to be permanent, must be slow; and whose product starts not at once into life and brilliancy, but gradually unfolds itself, requiring care and cherishing, or the blossoms will drop away, and no fruit will succeed. For love, calmly, deliberately, as I may say, wilfully to change into friendship at twenty years old is impossible.

For some time, however, after this conference Edmund seemed happy. That is, he was happy, from indulging himself more than ever, whenever he could find an opportunity, in the presence of the being he so deeply, so ardently loved, conscious that she knew of his love; and that, though she did not respond to it as he could have wished, yet she was not displeased with its existence; and that she would have loved, could affection be brought to the obedience of the will, at the dictates of virtue and reason. He knew he was esteemed by her, that she loved no other; *he* therefore was preferred to all the rest of his sex, though that preference

was but friendship. In one sense, also, he had now nothing to fear, for he repeatedly told me that, for many months previous to his declaration, his fears, his timidity, were so great, he dreaded nothing so much as my knowing that he loved me.

So we went on; he seemed most affectionately happy. Lady Mooren and Dorothea were again at Exeter, and he failed not to avail himself of their absence to be as much as possible at our house, and, as heretofore, he entered into all my feelings and pursuits. This state of things, however, was not of long continuance; new scenes were about to unfold themselves, and those of the most painful kind.

CHAPTER V.

It is Jealousy's peculiar nature
To swell small things to great—nay, out of nought
To conjure much; and then to lose its reason
Amid the hideous phantoms it has formed.

YOUNG.

ONE of the many things which now convinced me that Edmund's feelings were not likely to become, as he had hoped they would, those only of friendship, was his excessive proneness to be hurt by every trifle which, by any possibility, he could construe into a slight or an unkindness from me.

Thus did he become to me a subject of continual disquiet. I really loved him as a friend, as a brother; but not, as he did me, with that sort of idolatry which hangs upon its object for every comfort, every pleasure, that could make life not only happy, but supportable. I neither did nor could hope to love him in this manner, and therefore was I constantly giving him pain, when to do so was most distant from my thoughts—and all this arose from the simple cause that he took his own feelings for me as the measure of what mine ought to be for him.

Alas! Edmund had yet to learn that he had changed his feelings only in name; and that love lurked in his bosom, though he put on the disguise of friendship; and that I had no change to make, as I was still the friend I had ever been—and a forbearing one too, not to be shaken by the trials to

which he now so constantly subjected my patience; since to act in a manner to satisfy his morbid feelings required that I should keep a constant watch over every word and action: for not the least that referred to him but had its weight and its importance.

And now did I feel the painful responsibility I had incurred in thus, as it were, taking upon myself the charge of the happiness of another, under the name of friendship. I felt that I was as much bound to him by the tie I had admitted between us, as if I had been his by a regular betrothment, yet without the feelings and the hopes that render such a tie at once desirable and natural.

One day, when I was suffering from a reproach on the part of Edmund for which I had given no real cause, and, in truth, did not deserve, I was very suddenly summoned into the presence of my stepmother. The moment I saw her I felt assured, by the stateliness of her manner, the displeasure in her countenance, and the air with which she said "I wanted to see you in my own chamber," that she had something to break to me in which her own authority was to be more consulted than my feelings. To increase, if possible, my vexation, Dorothea was present.

"Colonel Holborne will be here to-day," she added, in an abrupt manner; "and I wished to speak to you before he arrives, as your father has directed me to make known to you on what account he comes hither, that you may be prepared to receive him as you ought."

I started with astonishment—"Colonel Holborne, madam!" I said; "and what is he to me, that my reception of him should now be different to what it has hitherto been at any other time? What need of my being prepared to receive him?"

"Because," replied Lady Mooren, colouring highly, as if her very veins were impatient to show her anger before she could express it in her words—"because, Elizabeth, your father designs him for your husband; that is all."

"It is an *all*, madam, that concerns the happiness of my future life," said I, trembling with alarm. "And I hope my father will not force upon me a marriage for which I have no inclination. Colonel Holborne is a person I should never even have conjectured he would have thought of as my future husband. He is at least forty; an old man for one

of my age. Indeed, I should be miserable but to think of him. I do not wish to marry at all."

"That excuse will not avail," said Lady Mooren; "but we are not blind, though you think us so; we can see what is going on around us; and that you and Mr. Edmund Oxenham seem to understand each other very well. But I can assure you that your father will never give his consent in that quarter. And so I advise you to be dutiful in time; and not to encourage a young man's hanging about you who is only tolerated here by the family because they cannot altogether withdraw their favour from one who did some services to my poor son; though, I must say, such services have already been repaid in a thousand ways."

Shocked as I felt, I was not altogether surprised to hear my stepmother speak thus of Edmund; because I knew that, in her estimation, fortune was worth; and that merit in poverty was, as it always is with common minds, a subject for contempt. Yet there had been moments in which I had seen his patient spirit overcome even her prejudices; when, in spite of herself, she had been pleased. I remembered this, and ventured now to say a word in Edmund's behalf, and to remind her ladyship of how much attention he had always shown to herself.

"Oh, yes," she replied; "no great thanks for that; Mr. Edmund Oxenham is the same to everybody. I really cannot feel very much obliged by a civility which makes no distinction; and is nothing more than a habit. I do not know that I have any reason to feel I owe these attentions you talk about either to the gratitude or the friendship of Mr. Edmund."

After another taunt or two about poor Edmund, my stepmother resumed the affair of Colonel Holborne; and now told me, that, for some time, by her advice, my father had been bent on the match; that he had given his word to the Colonel, and had gone so far that not even the political differences, which break so many family contracts, could interfere to alter his intentions; and, let what would come, I should wed him before Christmas.

"I am surprised, indeed, madam," I said, "at hearing this. I could not have imagined that my father, for a moment, would think himself bound by any such promise to Colonel Holborne, when all men say, should the war, as it is feared, come into the West, the Colonel will certainly es-

pouse the Parliamentary party, though he originally received his commission from the King."

"No matter for that, child," replied Lady Mooren; "Colonel Holborne is your father's friend; and, though he may be a Parliamentarian, he is not amongst the worst of that party: and, if things go wrong with the Royalists, it will be very desirable to have a friend on the opposite side; we may save our estate by it, as other Royalists have done, if it comes to a matter of fine and sequestration."

"Yes," said Dorothea; "it may be the saving of all our heads. You surely will not be the means of our losing our lives, and your own father his estates, on account of your obstinacy."

"My obstinacy," I replied, "has nothing whatever to do with it. And I do not see wherefore I should be made miserable in order to save you from a danger which is only chimerical. I might marry Colonel Holborne; and yet my father might be made to forfeit his estates, without any remission, if the King fails altogether."

"You talk like a silly girl," said Lady Mooren. "But this is not the only point. I recommended the match; and Colonel Holborne's merit was my principal object in so doing; though I should have been justified in doing so for the good of the family alone."

"At my cost, madam," said I; "but indeed I cannot wed Colonel Holborne."

"Tell your father so, if you dare," said Lady Mooren, in high wrath; "and see if he will allow you to argue the matter thus with him. For myself, I do assure you I shall hear no more of it, and desire that you will treat Colonel Holborne with all due respect when he comes, as your father's friend and as your future husband. And I hope we shall see something less of Mr. Edmund Oxenham seeking after you, and sitting and walking with you alone. You cannot deceive me, though you may the rest of your family. I will have no answer—go to your chamber. Ponder on these things, and learn that the duty of a child is best shown in obedience."

I was dismissed with that wave of the hand, and that haughty air, which in my stepmother indicated, I well knew, that she would hear not a word more, and all discussion must cease. To try to reason or to prevail with her, I felt would be useless; I therefore retired in silence to the soli-

tude of my own apartment. But there I could not rest; and I hastened to seek my father, in the hope to move him in my behalf. But, alas! it was the custom of Sir Arthur, in all our family contentions, always to avoid the argument which he could not satisfactorily refute.

My father shunned all conference with me on this occasion: and I was compelled to receive Colonel Holborne with that polite attention which I confess his character and station entitled him to expect; for nothing could be said against him in any other than a political view. But his known purpose to league with the Parliamentarians was quite enough to disgust me, even had no other motive existed for my disinclination towards him; for I was young, zealous, and devotedly attached to the Royal cause.

Not knowing what to do, or where to turn for help; fearing, every moment, that something would arise to make known to Edmund Colonel Holborne's pretensions towards myself; the project, wild and perilous as it might appear, suddenly occurred to me that I would endeavour to win the good will of the Colonel himself, in such a manner that I might trust him with a knowledge of the truth; and implore him not to hold my father to an engagement for which I had no inclination myself.

With this view I attempted to study the character of Colonel Holborne, in order that I might learn how to act for the best. From all I had heard, and from my own observations, I was induced to believe he was not an ungenerous man. Yet there was something about him forbidding—I knew not in what it consisted; but it arose principally, I apprehend, from his being one of those men who hold themselves so much aloof from the ordinary intercourse with mankind, that at last they lose the very appearance of possessing social feelings. Such, indeed, was the severity of Colonel Holborne's manners, that it kept almost every one at a distance; and, for myself, I could hardly smile in his presence, so much did his gloomy brow and his haughty air depress the naturally buoyant spirits of my youth. Yet I was not unjust to him; though his brooding and melancholy disposition seemed, in my mind, to prepare him for becoming the companion and leader of the stern and fanatical Parliamentarians. I once ventured to make some observations of this nature respecting the Colonel to my father; nor did he altogether deny their truth. "Yet, Elizabeth," said he,

"under that cold and rigid exterior there lies deep feeling and a strong and active power of imagination. And so influential is his character, so persuasive his eloquence, when he chooses to call it forth, and so great his disinterestedness, that, could he but be won over, he would be a host in the King's cause."

Would you believe it, Paulina, so young and enthusiastic was I at this period, that, had it not been for the fear of exciting the jealousy of Edmund, I believe, on hearing this, I should have entertained the project of gaining over Colonel Holborne for the service of King Charles. But I shuddered when I thought at what a price he must be gained. And poor Edmund! I had, indeed, a difficult part to act; and no one to whom I dared unbosom my anxious thoughts or to whom I might apply for advice. I had then none to counsel with but my own sad heart.

For myself, Colonel Holborne treated me much as a good but not a fond father treats a child he loves; one who is perfectly amenable to his authority; and so orderly in her obedience that it is never suspected she could entertain even the wish to do other than obey him. The Colonel paid me no very marked attention; fortunately, there was little time for it, for the affair at Launceston, about Sir Ralph Hopton and the Committee, taking place just at this period, and a hope that a peace might be effected in the West, caused both the Colonel and my father to be called away from home.*

On their return, however, the Colonel had an opportunity of being with me in company with my father; and the latter presenting him, more particularly than ever he had yet done to me, as the friend to whom he had long promised his daughter, I knew not what to do. The crisis was at hand: I felt I must now act, or I should give, by my silence, a tacit consent to the engagement made for me by my parent. With this conviction I determined on a great effort—that I would speak to Colonel Holborne alone; tell him the truth; and throw myself on his generosity—his magnanimity.

On that day, after dinner, we were all in the great parlour at Moortown. Mr. Sydney Godolphin and many strange gentlemen were there likewise. I was seated by the virginals, on which I had been playing to accompany a song, at the re-

* This attempt between the Royalists of the West and the Parliamentary Committee to bring about a peace altogether failed.

quest of Colonel Holborne, who hung over my chair listening with a softened air, and an interest I had never before seen him take in music. He asked me to play and sing to him again. I arose to fetch a book from another part of the room; he followed and assisted me in turning over my music: a great condescension from such a man. This trifling seemed new to himself as well as to me, for he dropped first one book and then another in helping me in my search after a song, and said with a smile (a smile from Colonel Holborne, my dear Paulina, think of that!), "I do these matters awkwardly; I am not used to them." I availed myself of this little opportunity, this *tête-à-tête* in a room full of company, to whisper the Colonel that I begged he would take the opportunity to go into the garden with me, as I wished to speak with him.

He looked surprised, but of course consented. I cannot repeat to you our conference. I was so much agitated I scarcely knew what I said. But I shall never forget the air of gloom, mingled with offended pride, with which, after hearing me stammer through my tale of distress (without making one effort to help me on, without uttering one word to relieve my embarrassment), he asked me, "If I loved another, or if I was engaged to another?"

I told him "No."

He said, "that was all he wished to learn; that, as my heart was free, he saw no ostensible reason for his giving up his claim to my hand, which, in the first instance, had been promised to him by my father; for the rest, he considered that I was too young to be able to judge for myself, and he would hope all from time, and his own assiduity, to engage my affections." So saying, he bowed with an offended air, and left me.

At this moment we quitted an arbour where the conversation had been held; nor did I suspect, till then, that Edmund had seen us engaged in talking together, as he had rapidly crossed a path at the end of the laurel-hedge. He gave a hurried and an agonized look towards us; he was white as death.

Alarmed for his state of mind, I followed with the utmost speed, and, taking the same path to the house, saw him (by a small door that opened into the garden) enter an apartment that was mine—it was my study. In another minute I entered it also. How shall I speak what were my feelings

when I saw Edmund seated on a couch, whereon he had thrown himself, pale, trembling, his eyes fixed on mine, with a look of such unutterable agony, that I became most seriously alarmed. His power of speech was for the moment gone.

"Shall I call for help?" I exclaimed. "Good God! what is this?" In my fright I moved towards the door. He caught me by the hand and detained me. Again did he fix his eyes on me. There was, I thought, a look of frenzy in their expression. He was cold, and a convulsive shudder seemed to steal over all his frame, as the words, uttered in a low deep voice—"You have then engaged yourself to Colonel Holborne," passed his lips.

I essayed to speak; but he would not let me. "I see it," he continued, distractedly—"I see it all. Confirm my misery—say that it is with your own consent; say that you love him. Speak the truth at once; fear not for me—this night I quit your house, and for ever. My presence shall no more distress you. Heed not what becomes of me. I go, I know not whither—care not whither. What matters it what becomes of me!—of such a wretch as I am; as you have made me!"

He started from his seat as he concluded this emphatic burst of feeling; it had been spoken so rapidly, so vehemently, it was impossible to interrupt him. He started up; he would have sprung past me to the door that led into the garden, but I prevented his purpose; I caught hold of both his hands, and held them in mine, conjuring him to hear me. The fright I sustained gave me courage, and indeed strength to struggle with and detain him. My terrors had now risen beyond all control, for horror was in his looks; and I feared even for his life did he quit me in these moments of excited feeling—of agonized and almost frenzied apprehension.

At length he freed his hands from my grasp, and exclaimed —"Do not, do not trifle with me! Tell me truly, as there is a God above who looks on us both—tell me: do you love Colonel Holborne?"

"I do not—indeed, I do not! Calm yourself: I cannot bear to see you thus; you must not, you shall not leave me!"

On hearing these words, spoken with all that earnestness of feeling, rendered strong by apprehension, he seemed, in an instant, to pass from the lowest depths of misery to a sense of hope and joy. He threw his arms around me, burst into

a flood of tears, and exclaimed: "Then you do love me more than as a brother—you will not wed Colonel Holborne—you will bid me hope and live."

There are moments when, carried, as it were, out of ourselves, beyond ourselves, we say the very thing we would not; which, at any other time, we would pause upon—nay, altogether condemn. This was such a moment. I felt the unconquerable force, the appalling ascendancy that a strong paroxysm of suffering gives another over our whole heart and frame, when we know ourselves to be the cause of such suffering. I was overpowered—I had no strength for any further efforts; all inferior motives, all other considerations sank before the one great feeling of fear. My acquiescence was, as it were, compelled by the terror of my own mind, and I answered what awe compelled me to answer, without the possibility of a moment's reflection on what I did.

Need I tell what followed? That hour saw our hands plighted to each other, and not till that hour, perhaps, did I know the state of my own heart, and the power Edmund had gained over its affections. A moment of terror is often a moment of conviction. I was no longer self-deceived; no longer as I had delighted to call myself—his sister.

CHAPTER VI.

From early youth, War hath my mistress been;
And, though a rugged one, I'll constant prove,
And not forsake her now. There may be joys
Which, to the strange o'erwhelming of the soul,
Visit the lover's breast beyond all others:
E'en now, how dearly do I feel there may!

JOANNA BAILLIE.

AND now came the most painful trial of all—the necessity, as I imagined, of concealing for the present from the family what had so lately passed between Edmund and myself. My doing so was not a dereliction of my duty for the first time; since, alas! I never had confided in my parents. The natural frankness and openness of my disposition, as I have before stated, had been chilled in the bud.

I knew my own deficiencies, and felt the want of the guiding hand—the directing principle. I sighed for the counsel

of the friends I dared not seek, and the result of this new load of responsibility which I had taken on myself was, that I became oppressed with a secret which destroyed my peace, and left me doubtful and perplexed how to act. I had a thousand self-reproaches, and a thousand scruples of conscience to combat every day, and all because I was prohibited by my habitual fears from calling in the help of my natural protector—my father—to lead my devious steps into the paths of duty and of peace. I felt I was acting a disingenuous part, and more than once did I resolve, at all hazards, to renounce it; to tell my father the truth, and trust to his affection, satisfied that the natural generosity of his character would not allow him to drive his only daughter to despair.

I was aware that a great effort, or the encounter of a painful scene, though terrific when pictured to the imagination, if we but screw our courage to the sticking-place, is often got over more easily than we are apt to believe when we contemplate it afar off. Like objects viewed through a mist, our apprehensions gain magnitude by distance. I determined, then, I would be bold, in order to be honest—yes, I would speak out. I often hardened myself, as I may say, to make the effort; and more than once sought my father for the purpose of confession. But, as if the spirit of evil lurked in the way, in order to prevent me, whenever I had wrought my courage to the degree necessary for the encounter, something always stepped in to delay it.

Once or twice, when my father was alone, I approached him for the purpose of revealing the truth; but he received me with so little fondness, with so stern and stately an air, that my coward heart seemed to die within me. In one of these interviews I did venture to speak two or three sentences by way of preface. But I looked up in his face, and, seeing there the cold indications of indifference, the vacant eye, the rigid and compressed mouth, whilst the ear seemed scarcely to listen to what was said, I felt abashed, chilled, as if a palsied hand were upon me. I paused ere I could proceed.

At that moment, one of our blue-coated serving-men came into the room with a letter to my father. He read it, and gave a verbal answer. I dreaded to see the varlet retire; for his presence had for awhile suspended the fearful moment, and I felt as if I had lost a protector when the man

closed the door. But some other interruption succeeded; and this, like every former opportunity, passed, with nothing done; and afterwards my father's gloomy looks, reserved manner, and anxious meditations came again, and still I was overawed.

Alas! I did not reflect that these melancholy moods—these stern reveries and anxious broodings—were not intended to repulse me from his heart; but that the state of the country—the welfare, the honour, the very life of the King were at stake; that both day and night was my father labouring for the service of his beloved master; and, were it possible, to bring about a peace, to spare the shedding of human blood, and to end this unnatural quarrel among ourselves.

I must not here omit stating, as it is essential to my narrative, that about this time the growing suspicions of my stepmother and Dorothea towards Edmund, in respect to me, so frequently occasioned his meeting unkind treatment at their hands, that it roused in my breast a more than usual feeling of indignation. I was shocked at their ingratitude and injustice; and in order, in some measure, to make amends for this cruelty, I behaved towards him with yet greater kindness than I had ever done before; so that, for my sake, he was tempted to bear with many indignities to which he would not otherwise have submitted, whilst such conduct on their part had the injurious effect of justifying, in his own eyes, his still keeping secret the unhappy engagement into which we had both so rashly plunged.

At this period, Colonel Holborne was so often absent on political matters that I saw very little of him. He was still one of the Parliamentary Committee of the West, and still was for a peace, which, however, from their unreasonable demands, he and his fellow-committee men were doing all they could to render more difficult to bring about. Whenever he came to Moortown, he treated me with the highest marks of respect, and of a calm and dignified affection, but not of passionate love. He never urged his suit; it was not a time, my father had said, for marrying or giving in marriage; and the Colonel seemed, by his patience and forbearance, to acquiesce in the opinion. But, though he forbore to press his suit, he equally forbore to resign it.

You will here exclaim, that I ought to have insisted on undeceiving him. That I never deceived him wilfully may be, perhaps, a poor excuse, yet it is a just one. For think

how I was situated! What could I do? Where was I to turn for direction or advice? I had no one to confide in; and in the unfortunate Edmund I had an injured, a devoted heart, with an almost distracted mind, to manage. With the Colonel I had no easy task to accomplish, for I knew not how I could now tell him of an engagement with Edmund, which was not only unknown to my father, but which the Colonel himself would never believe could have been so wholly unexpected on my part at the time of our interview in the garden, when he had declared his resolution to persevere in his suit on learning that my hand was free. I knew he was a man of strong passions, though of cool temper, and I felt certain, did I now reveal the truth, that a rencontre would inevitably follow between him and Edmund. A hope to prevent a meeting, which would probably terminate in bloodshed, kept me as effectually silent towards Colonel Holborne as fear, on a different account, had towards my father; and now again did I experience, even in a greater degree than before, the danger, the perplexity, to which the youthful heart is exposed when it keeps secret its most vital concerns, and renounces the guiding counsel of its natural protector.

Great was my fault, so likewise was its punishment: for, as if all I had to suffer was not enough, I had to encounter, on the part of Edmund, the most groundless jealousy, occasioned by that spirit of self-torment which allowed him no rest in all that referred to his love for me. His apprehensions of losing me; his dread lest I should have mistaken my feelings, or, from strong circumstances, might be led to tear him from my bosom, were all fears that served to keep alive his doubts and his never-ending suspicions. These ever-festering wounds much irritated him, and at length affected his once placid temper; so that he was perpetually quarrelling with me, or finding fault for trifles; in something or other I was ever to blame.

All this proceeded not from an arbitrary disposition, but from a depth of affection so engrossing that it aimed at a unity of soul between us which was scarcely consistent with human nature in the present order of things. Thus, if in the least I differed from him in opinion, his love instantly magnified it into a serious opposition which indicated difference in principle; and I was reproved with an earnestness, an anxiety of feeling, the most distressing; so that I began to

doubt whether I was the woman really calculated to render a mind so susceptible as Edmund's happy. For I was too sincere to dissemble with him, and too much accustomed to act from reason and reflection to say I was convinced of an error simply because he wished I should be so.

Hence had he become to me, though a dear, yet a tormenting lover; and in this respect Colonel Holborne stood in painful yet (for himself) advantageous opposition to him. He never found fault with me, and, from being a calmer and less prejudiced observer, often did me that justice which Edmund denied to me. Yet, on this very account, was he jealous also, and would frequently say the Colonel flattered, if he did but even moderately commend me. I felt this. I felt that in most things the Colonel better understood me—shall I say it?—more justly appreciated my character than did his more favoured rival.

Women, more especially if they have any pretensions to feeling and imagination, are, generally speaking, very nice on the point of appreciation, and seldom love long the friend who, they are convinced, undervalues them; for such a friend is constantly wounding their feelings and mortifying their self-esteem. Emulation is damped and endeavour checked. But how different is it with the man who understands a woman's merit, and pays it the homage due! He raises her in her own esteem, and in that of others; whilst he bestows on conscious merit that praise which fosters its efforts, and becomes its best reward; since nothing to a delicate mind is so cheering or so sweet as commendation from the lips of one truly loved. The friend who is ever finding fault, without sufficient reason, reminds one too much of the envious and dissatisfied; we suspect the motive of such disapprobation; and, if he classes all praise indiscriminately under the name of flattery, he shows he has no right sense of justice; for, though it is base to flatter, it is dishonest to withhold well-merited commendation.

These, and many similar reflections, would force themselves on me, when I thought upon the strange humour that now possessed the unhappy Edmund, and of the more courteous demeanour of Colonel Holborne. I felt that, with the former, this perpetual finding fault and bickering was injurious to our mutual affection; whilst he was giving an advantage to his more temperate rival which he would have been the last to desire should be given.

But, though I candidly avow I thought Colonel Holborne more just, more uniformly kind to me than Edmund, I never for a moment wilfully encouraged his addresses. I thought that, as I had not yet found either courage or opportunity to confess my unhappy engagement to my father, the Colonel had no right to know it; and although I saw plainly wherein he had the advantage, in respect to temper and carriage, yet I felt his cool and somewhat selfish love would bear no comparison with the deep and devoted passion of the tender and sensitive Edmund.

Would his affection meet the approval of my father, when the time came to make known to him the truth? In what way should I get rid of the pretensions of the Colonel? When should I take courage to make my confession? These were questions that pressed themselves on my mind. But my fatal irresolution still prevailed, and the moment for answering them firmly was, alas! delayed.

CHAPTER VII.

I rather tell thee what is to be feared
Than what I fear.
Give him all kindness: I had rather have
Such men my friends than enemies.
SHAKSPERE.

It was about this time that the war which had long been raging in other parts of the kingdom made its appearance in the West, and that in a very formidable manner. Many who till now had been waverers, or had confined their politics to opinions only, having more to do with words than deeds, at length took a decided part, being compelled to do so by the circumstances of the times, which would no longer allow of neutrality. But as you, Paulina, are almost as well acquainted as myself with the public affairs of the West of England at the period to which I allude, I will not say one word more of war or politics than I am compelled to do by the nature of the narrative I have undertaken to relate. I shall here, therefore, merely state in what way these public feelings and events affected us at Moortown.

I pass over the gradual steps and little circumstances by

which it became apparent that a coolness had sprung up between my father and Colonel Holborne. I was not long in doubt respecting the cause, as I could collect enough by the few words I heard dropped in one or two of their conversations to learn that the Colonel decided on retaining his commission in the regiment under his command, in which all the officers (except two who had quitted it) and nearly all the men had declared for the Parliament. This regiment, it appeared, was now to be numbered with those which were under the Earl of Stamford, as general of the Republican forces in the West.

Offensive as it could not fail to be to my father that Colonel Holborne should thus decide on retaining his command of a regiment to serve against the King—in fact, he did not dissemble his feelings on the occasion to the Colonel himself—it was most unaccountable to me, when each so plainly knew the other's mind, knew such a barrier as this existed to separate them, that they did not at once break their friendship, that all intercourse did not immediately cease. As to myself, knowing how devoted my father was in his loyalty to the King, I could not for an instant suppose he would hold himself bound in honour to one who was prepared to act the part of a rebel against him. I took it for granted, therefore, that my father would not urge upon me, either now, or at any future time, an alliance with the avowed enemy of the King.

Yet, with a full knowledge of Colonel Holborne's sentiments, and expecting that every day he would be called from our neighbourhood to active service, my father still suffered him to come to our house. And although the growing coolness between them became more and more marked almost every time they met, yet, as if by mutual consent, they avoided, as much as possible, the subject of politics, and seemed determined that, let what would arise to separate them in public, in their private intercourse, at least, there should be no absolute breach. My father's manner to the colonel, however, had lost all its accustomed cordiality: there was something of constraint, I fancied, even in his most ordinary civilities. Colonel Holborne was by far the less embarrassed of the two. Yet, even with him, there was often an obvious effort to keep up conversation on the most indifferent topics of discourse; and that certain note of decaying love, a strict observance of ceremony, was apparent

with each towards the other. I could not help fancying they were like enemies, who, for mutual convenience, have for awhile agreed upon a truce, but without anything like feelings of satisfaction on either side.

At length the time arrived when it was intimated to us that the Colonel was about leaving the neighbourhood on matters of public duty. We well knew what that meant: he was about to march under the orders of the Earl of Stamford. There was one week's delay; and in that brief space, as the event proved, how much happened of vital import to us all!

You may readily believe, my dear friend, that my father's manner did not escape the observation of Edmund; and, deeply as he was interested in all that could affect Sir Arthur's views about myself, he began to build hopes upon what he saw; hopes that this displeasure, so apparent towards his rival, would cause my father to change his purpose, and to withdraw from Colonel Holborne not only his esteem but all countenance of his suit.

Edmund was not slow to communicate his thoughts on the subject to me; and though, from a closer observation than he had found opportunity to make, I was not so sanguine as himself, yet I was not altogether devoid of hope. And now did I more than ever feel I must not let the Colonel take his farewell of me without setting him right in respect to the engagement which, by my father's will and not mine, he had persisted in believing existed between us. I felt he ought to know that I was now indeed engaged to another, both in heart and hand. Yet the recollection of my father, and the awe which ever accompanied the thoughts of confiding to him the truth, still pressed deeply, painfully on my mind; and I verily believe, from mere irresolution, I should have suffered the Colonel to depart still self-deceived had not fortune, whilst I was yet wavering, given me the opportunity I desired of coming to something like an understanding with my father, and that in a most unexpected way. It was thus.

There was a charming lawn situated at the back of the house and within the surrounding walls. There I often indulged in my solitary thoughts and painful reveries. One day, about the period I have named, I was strolling along this lawn thoughtful and melancholy, my mind intent on the most anxious subjects, when, to my surprise, my father, who had seen me from his closet (a small room within a tower that faced the garden), descended and joined me.

I was indeed surprised, as I had seldom if ever known my father leave his study to come to me in my solitary walks. There was a seriousness, a settled solemnity, a thoughtfulness about his countenance, with a slight embarrassment of manner, when he first spoke to me, that made me feel convinced he had come to speak on some matter of which he doubted whether it would be agreeable to my feelings. This conviction, added to my accustomed awe of his presence, so agitated me that I felt my heart sink within me; and, before he began his discourse, all my assumed courage died away, and I found I had none to support me in any struggle that might ensue.

We took two or three turns upon the lawn without a word being spoken, till, anxious to say something to break this embarrassing silence, and scarcely knowing what I said, my eye glancing at the moment on some woods that were beyond the walls, I made some remark about a gap which I thought should be filled by planting some young trees.

"Ay," said my father, "it is truly a perpetual offence to the eye, but a still greater offence to the feelings; at least, to my feelings, as it is a memorial of the folly—ay, worse than the folly—of my own father. That gap is a remembrance of woods felled to satisfy the cravings of the law."

I was astonished at hearing this, as I had never before heard my father allude to my grandfather by a word of reproach; and, as to our family affairs, Sir Arthur managed them all himself, and thought them so entirely removed from the province of a woman that it was only by accident I had ever heard the least circumstance about his estates, his tenants, or his possessions of any kind. The ease in which we had hitherto lived, with all the accommodations and elegancies of life by which we were surrounded, had come to me, like the sun and air, as blessings unsought, that seemed to flow in upon me in the natural order of things. But it is only the poor (who know difficulty and have to toil for their support) that can truly appreciate the blessings which those enjoy who have their daily bread set before them without a struggle or the fear of want.

My father paused after making this remark; his feelings seemed touched and softened by some train of thinking to which it had given birth; and, seeing his looks were of a gentler kind than for some days past, I felt encouraged; now I thought was the time to speak—now that his feelings were

moved by recollecting that his own father had left him so much cause for regret. I fancied, therefore, the remembrance of it might make him fear lest he too should give his child occasion to reflect on his memory hereafter with the same saddening feeling.

Emboldened by these considerations, I ventured to tell him how disagreeable to me were the addresses of Colonel Holborne, how painful his obstinate persistence in choosing to consider me engaged to him, and how impossible it was I could ever be his without becoming completely wretched. I even touched on his political principles as a cause of dislike, which I hoped would operate with my father himself in his disfavour, and finally conjured Sir Arthur to feel for me as a parent, and not to suffer his naturally generous nature to be influenced against his own child; and begged him to allow me formally to dismiss the Colonel, or that he would himself put an end to his pretensions.

I was astonished at what followed. Instead of that authoritative tone and manner in which my father had been wont to address me on all points relating to this affair, he paused only for a moment, and, with a look of distress, not as if he were now pained for himself, but for me, he fixed his eyes, that were filled with tears, upon me, and took my hand affectionately, as he said, "O, my child, you know not what I suffer at this moment on your account. But I will confide all to you. I will put myself and all that I possess into your power, to save or to destroy me as you will; I will trust all to your affection. If Colonel Holborne is dismissed I am a ruined man. You are the only link between us—the only claim I have on his forbearance—yet he is a generous man."

It would be impossible for me to describe what were my feelings at the sight of my father's deep distress. He was in tears. Tears in a man are always painful. But to see a mind naturally so firm as his thus moved struck me with a sense of sympathy not unallied to fear. I felt at that moment I not only could have resigned all my own hopes of happiness for his sake, but, could the sacrifice of my life have served him, it should have been made. Why had my stepmother or her daughter ever stepped in between my father and myself to block up the way to that tender confidence which, if but encouraged by a word or a look, I should have delighted to repose in a father's bosom?

I answered I scarcely knew how, so much was I surprised

and affected by what passed; but I gave my father the fondest assurances of duty and obedience, and begged him eagerly to tell me all.

"All will soon be told, my child," he said; "my father was imprudent in his affairs, and unwise in his efforts to repair the inroads which his thoughtless expenditure had made in his estate, and rash, even to folly, in his political career. To spare you all unnecessary details concerning his lawsuits, his mortgages, and numerous other difficulties of a like nature, here is the result: by fines in the Star Chamber he lost much, by extravagance still more, and by the law nearly all that remained; till at length his whole estate became embarrassed and completely within the power of Colonel Holborne's father. He, however, did not long survive my unhappy parent. Colonel Holborne stepped into his place, and succeeded to all his rights over my ruined fortunes. I expected that, in giving the law its course, he would render my ruin complete; he had it in his power to do so; and any man of a less noble nature would not have scrupled; as in seizing on all that I possessed the world would not have condemned him; he would but have taken what he was entitled to call his own. But, oh! how differently did Colonel Holborne act! He pitied me—pitied the sorrows and distresses of my aged and widowed mother, who was then alive, and came to me with his attorney at his side—not to enforce the penalty of the law, and to close on the ruined heir by seizing all the lands forfeited by his father*—but rather to learn if some means might not be adopted to save the inheritance of an ancient family; to spare me the cruel process of the law, and to arrange for the payment, by an annual instalment and a moderate rate of interest, of far less than his father had required, till, in the course of years, the whole debt should be discharged. Overcome by such an instance of generosity, I thankfully acceded to his proposals, and all was speedily arranged between us. The original parchments, however, were neither cancelled nor destroyed; so that all my estate still lies within the power of Colonel Holborne; for, though years have rolled

* The form of mortgages at the date of this narrative was not like the present. There was generally a day stated, called *a set day*, for the payment of the principal; when, if that were passed over, all the estate, or whatever it might be that had been mortgaged, became absolutely forfeited to the mortgagee.

on, and I have never hitherto failed in the payment of the annual portion of the debt, yet so heavy was it when my father died, that it came to me as a burden enough to crush the spirit of a son. It is not even yet half paid. And at this hour, did Colonel Holborne choose but to be vindictive, on account of my adherence to the King, he need not seek the assistance of Committee-men and Sequestrators to ruin me; he could do it himself, by the simple process of the law. The very roof that now covers my head would not be mine. He might at once crush me."

"But he would not do so; I am sure he would not," I exclaimed.

"I think he would not," said my father; "but you have not heard all! So much was I overcome by my deep sense of gratitude for the manner in which Colonel Holborne had stepped forward to save me from ruin, that, in the warmth of my feelings, I vowed neither public or private dissentions—for even then we were beginning to differ in opinion concerning politics, which made his generosity the greater—should ever, on my part, cause a breach between us. And, should it be the will of Heaven to afford me the opportunity in any way to requite him for so much generosity, I solemnly vowed that I would do it at any sacrifice, and that not my own life should be spared to serve him. Elizabeth, need I tell the rest? the occasion came—I did requite Colonel Holborne with the promise of your hand. Your father's word must not be broken."

"O, do not say it! do not thus pronounce my doom, my dear, dear father!" I exclaimed, as I threw my arms around his neck, clinging to him. "You do not know——"

He stopped me. "I neither know, nor wish to know, any cause that might make my purpose even yet more painful than it is to myself, now that I learn how adverse you are to the match, and find that he has become an avowed rebel to the King. But to know your secret—if you have a secret—could not shake my resolution to fulfil my word. Elizabeth. I have preserved nothing entire that belonged to our ancient family and to a gentleman but my honour; I cannot, therefore, break my promise given to Colonel Holborne, that you should be his. He is a generous man, but not a weak one; a girl's reluctance to wed with one who has been the preserver of her father and his fortunes will not weigh with him to give you up; and, as I should hold any intimations

given by you—any attempts made, however indirectly—to lead him to renounce you, of his own free will, dishonourable—as an evasion of my contract—I charge you, on your duty to me, to make none."

I shuddered as the word *contract* met my ear. To think with what determination my father could speak of an engagement so all-important to me. The *contract!* the very word seemed to my young heart to mean only law settlements and parchments, but not love—not the freedom of an unrestrained choice. I could not speak my feelings—I could not say to my father, whom I so much loved, and for whose distress I felt so keenly at this moment—I could not say to him that I would at once disappoint all his reliance on my duty, my affection, ruin all his hopes, and even tempt Colonel Holborne—could the generosity of his nature be assailed by such temptation—to act vindictively, by calling up his resentment towards that father. With such a prospect of our family distress before me—of my father's ruin—the thought of my secret engagement to Edmund presented itself as an act of such guilt to my mind that, were it possible, I would have concealed it not only from the knowledge of all the world but even from my own heart. Did I but glance an eye that way, all was difficulty and danger. I shuddered, as I gave but a passing thought to the subject, and shrunk from it with a sickening of the soul that so affected me I nearly sunk at my father's feet, yet I dared not avow the truth.

He supported me kindly; he thought that my distress proceeded alone from my dislike to Colonel Holborne; and, in the most earnest manner, implored me to endeavour to overcome it—at least, not to give the Colonel (more especially at this crisis, when he was yet unprepared, and had the worst to fear from the Republican party) any cause to suspect. Sir Arthur concluded with drawing from me a promise that I would continue to receive the Colonel with every mark of kindness during the short time he remained in our neighbourhood, and that I would on no occasion refuse him my company.

My father commended and kissed me as I gave him the promise he required. These were such unusual marks of his favour that I doubly felt their value. He again assured me of his affection, and that nothing but the circumstances in

which he stood would compel him to ask of me that which he saw, with regret, gave me so much pain.

Thus we parted. But no sooner was I alone than a full sense of all the difficulties of my situation recurred to my mind in a manner the most distracting. I felt I had done wrong—that my indecision had been carried to a criminal extent. I felt I was playing an unworthy part, and that even the gratification I had so lately experienced in obliging my father was anything but praiseworthy; as my compliance with his request had been disingenuous, and was therefore allied to falsehood; for had I not concealed from him the truth?

Thus with him again was I thrown back on the old position; fresh resolutions were formed but never fulfilled; a deep sense of remorse followed, and another determination to part with Edmund; but all ended, as it must ever end with the weak and the irresolute, in letting what was wrong remain to right itself, and in referring to time and chance that which a more vigorous resolution should have at once decided.

CHAPTER VIII.

Base envy withers at another's joy,
And hates that excellence it cannot reach.
THOMSON.

With that malignant envy which turns pale
And sickens if a friend prevail;
Which merit and success pursues with hate,
And blasts the worth it cannot imitate.
CHURCHILL.

It was during these days of anxiety and doubt that a neighbour of ours, Lady Millard, with that far-sighted policy which so many timid persons adopted at this crisis, but which so seldom answered the desired end of keeping well with both parties, determined on giving a ball to the leading families around her, who were known to have espoused opposite sides in the political contests of the time. You will observe, that, at this juncture, the war, though coming towards the West with a very formidable aspect, had not

yet actually reached us; so that, although Royalist and Parliamentarian now met with a very ill grace, and frequent quarrels and duels took place between them, yet they occasionally did meet, and generally at the house of some common friend, who, like Lady Millard, wished to the last, and by every possible means, to establish a character of neutrality. Some even carried this precautionary conduct so far as to divide their sons, nephews, wards, or dependants, and to cause one or more to serve the King, and the rest the Parliament.*

Acting on this supposed principle of prudence, Lady Millard had invited to her ball, amongst the Royalists, our family; and among the Roundheads, Colonel Holborne; but she had omitted Edmund Oxenham, though he was at this period known to be most intimate at Moortown. How this happened none of us could conjecture; in all probability, it arose from her ladyship not being aware he was then with us as my father's guest. Edmund was a favourite with Lady Millard; the omission, therefore, could not have been designed. My stepmother might have taken him with us, without the ceremony of invitation, but she would not hear of his going, though her daughter seemed displeased at her denial—I could not think wherefore, as Dorothea could not have forgotten Edmund's former proofs of indifference towards her. But, perhaps, as she had certainly once loved him, she might now have raised her hopes anew, on the supposition that any partiality he might entertain towards me would be effectually cured by my expected alliance with Colonel Holborne, and Edmund might be won for herself.

Be this as it may, as Edmund was not to go, she made some excuse—indisposition, I believe, and would stay at home likewise; and my father, who held in contempt what he termed the mean and shallow policy of Lady Millard, refused his company. But, as Colonel Holborne told us he had accepted the invitation, my stepmother proposed (and my father seemed to approve her plan) that the Colonel should conduct her and myself to this ball. I could not say

* A modern writer, Mr. D'Israeli, who has thrown so much valuable light on the domestic manners and feelings, as well as on the more public history of the times of Charles I., has noticed the worldly-minded conduct of persons who acted exactly as is here represented in respect to Lady Millard, and has given many curious instances of families dividing their sons and kindred into Royalists and Parliamentarians.

a word in contradiction. Indeed, after the promise I had given to my father, I felt I was bound to go. But, so well did I know the jealousy, the distrust, the misery such an arrangement would occasion in Edmund (who was not present when Lady Mooren proposed the plan), that I dared not speak of it. I knew not how to act, and I ventured to hope that he might not know anything about it till the day came, when it would be obvious to him, by the attendance of the Colonel, that the scheme was solely one of my stepmother's, for which I was not answerable. My greatest fear was that, not knowing what had passed between my father and myself, should he previously hear of the engagement, Edmund would vehemently insist on my refusing to be of a party where Colonel Holborne was to be our sole conductor; since, situated as I was with him, such a step would proclaim myself engaged to the Colonel in the sight of all the world, and my stepmother would be sure to do all she could to confirm the impression. It now wanted only two days to the ball. I endeavoured, as much as possible, during the interval, to avoid seeing Edmund alone, to shun any private conversation with him; he perceived it, and was greatly hurt.

On the evening of the day preceding this party of pleasure (the most miserable that was ever formed for me) Edmund found an opportunity to speak to me alone. In those hurried moments he let me know that he had heard the report of my being about to go to the ball with the man who made such insolent pretensions to me. But he (Edmund) did not make himself unhappy about it because he knew that I could not —that I would not—nay, that I dare not accompany Colonel Holborne to such a meeting without him; well knowing how offensive it would to his feelings did I go.

This was spoken with a want of temper, with a bitterness, and indeed an arrogance of manner, that, in a moment, fired my quick feelings (too quick, perhaps) to a sense of injury. I thought it great injustice towards myself that Edmund would never give me credit for wishing to act rightly towards him. I felt it also to be cruel on his part, that, knowing as he did our engagement was but conditional, and a secret between ourselves, he should now call on me to act precisely as he would have a right to do were such engagement public, and confirmed by the sanction of my father. Without knowing, also, what might have passed between my father and my-

self to render my compliance with the present arrangement absolutely necessary, what right, thought I, had Edmund thus to take me to task?

Irritated, and I think justly, by such conduct on his part, and such considerations on my own, I believe I answered pettishly; for I felt, in every point, since my unhappy secret compact with Edmund, that if there was to be peace preserved between us I must invariably yield; I must conciliate, and he must control. Yet, notwithstanding all my pride, I submitted to this; not merely from the fear with which he had inspired me, from the apprehension of the dreadful effects that, in all probability, his own violence of feeling would have upon himself, but because I was so thoroughly convinced of his sincerity, and of the depth and ardour of that love, which was, in fact, the origin of all his jealousy and all his faults and fears.

An ardent attachment has an almost irresistible power over the heart of a woman; even her pride yields to it, when she feels no positive aversion to the man in whose bosom she has kindled such a flame. This was the cause, possibly the sole cause, why, though I now and then felt offended with Edmund, and even resisted the unreasonable demands of his jealous love, yet, however provoked, I never seriously thought of breaking with him; as I felt convinced no other human being ever had loved or ever could love me as he did. I was to him the life of life, without which all the rest of the world would be to him as nothing: he had often said this, and I felt it to be truth. Colonel Holborne (who had been forced on my endurance) loved me; but he did not, he could not, love me so well; for his character was neither of so tender, nor, though serious, of so melancholy a nature, as Edmund's. Colonel Holborne, I believed, would leave me for ever with a wounded heart, but Edmund with a broken one.

It is strange, whilst these convictions weighed strongly on my mind, that, in the present instance, I suffered my resentments to take a deeper hold upon me than they had ever done before; so that I was not sorry in my heart I had the conscious support of the duty I owed my father, to make me resolve on going to the ball, whether Edmund liked it or not. Yet not, however, wishing to irritate him, I said nothing about it, but continued some little preparations I was making for the occasion, as if nothing more than common had occurred. The evening previous to the day so anxiously expected I was

employed in some needlework assisted by Dorothea, who seemed so much to anticipate that this ball, in some way or other, would be attended with painful and mortifying consequences to me, that she insisted on helping me in my preparations for it.

Whilst thus engaged, Edmund, who looked calmer than when I had last seen him, came in and seated himself by my side. Dorothea took pains to tell him for what purpose we were working so intently. Edmund answered not one word; but, on her rising to fetch some silk from the lower end of the room, whilst her back was turned towards us, fixing a look of tender melancholy on me, he said, in a low, firm, and impressive voice, "You must not—I feel you cannot go, after what passed at our last meeting. I care not, then, how you are employed—since I feel you cannot go."

Dorothea returned to her seat, which stood near us, before I could reply, so that nothing more passed on the subject, and the conversation reverted to general topics. But yet it was forced; it did not flow easily; it was evident we all were more engaged with our own thoughts than with each other. At last, Dorothea asked Edmund if he had seen the beautiful doves which had lately been sent as a present to her mother by the Lady Millard; observing there was one of them now flying across the lawn. "I thought that you, Mr. Oxenham," continued Dorothea, "would feel a peculiar interest in white-breasted birds."

"Perhaps I ought to do so," said Edmund, with a sigh, and in a manner so peculiar that I involuntarily looked up in his face, and inquired what he meant.

"Have you never heard," he replied, "that with an Oxenham, during many generations, a white-breasted bird has been considered ominous?"

"No," I said; "I never heard it. To what do you allude?"

"To an idle tale, I believe," said Dorothea, answering the question I had put to Edmund. "I have only in part heard it myself," she continued. "But I will venture to say, you would like to hear Mr. Oxenham's family connection with the white-breasted bird related to you by himself.

"I should, indeed," I replied; "do, Edmund, tell us this tradition. We will work on, and listen the while."

Edmund drew another deep sigh; but, without further preface, thus began.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WHITE-BREASTED BIRD OF OXENHAM.

Behold, our infancies in tales delight.

WALCOT.

They spake not a word;
But, like dumb statues, or breathless stones,
Stared on each other, and look'd deadly pale.

SHAKSPERE.

IN the record of an ancient chronicler of the West, long preserved in our family, will be found some remarkable particulars respecting the house of Oxenham—a house no less distinguished for honour than for gentle blood, from a younger branch of which I am descended. This record makes mention of a singular history, connected with the first appearance of that white-breasted bird, whose sudden and mysterious visitation is ever deemed to be the herald of approaching death or woe to man or woman of the race of Oxenham.

The chronicler relates that, towards the middle of the fourteenth century, Sir Reginald Oxenham, a brave and gallant knight, who lived in great splendour, exercising all the virtues of loyalty to the King, piety to the Church, and hospitality no less to the stranger and the wayfarer than to his own friends and neighbours, was the happy father of three fair children, a son and two daughters. The youngest of these, the son, was to him, however, a dear-bought pledge of conjugal affection; for his birth cost Sir Reginald the life of a beloved spouse, whose place he never filled by any second marriage.

After his death, Sir Reginald, more, it was believed, to divert his grief than from any other cause, gave up his time to the most strenuous exertions, in order to increase the honours and the wealth of a family, of whose blood and descent he had always been but too proud—it was his weakness, but, as he strove to add to his possessions by none but the most honourable means, it could hardly be called his fault. His attachment to the Church was sincere; and, thinking it would be making a sacrifice acceptable to Heaven, and at the same time would enable him at his death to give all his worldly wealth for the aggrandizement of his only son, he proposed to devote his two daughters as nuns to the cell, as soon as they should be of sufficient age to take on them

the veil of the novice, preparatory to that of the professed sister.

Though neither of the daughters, Hilda and Maud, felt any desire for the life of a recluse, yet they dared not murmur against the will of their father, who speedily made all the necessary arrangements for their future destination; and the abbess of St. Bennet's in Cornwall consented to receive them as the daughters of her house, at an appointed time. Before, however, the time arrived, the hopes of Sir Reginald received a bitter blow, and all his plans were changed by the sudden death of that young and promising son, for the sake of whose worldly aggrandizement he had shown himself so willing to sacrifice both his daughters. He now determined on retaining them near his own person; to marry them nobly, and, at his death, divide his lands and all that he possessed in equal shares between them, as co-heiresses of the ancient house of Oxenham.

Hilda, however, the elder daughter, who was now grown to woman's estate, and was of strong passions, deep designs, and grasping views, liked not this proposal of partitioning between herself and her sister the whole estate; and, as she was the elder born, conceived the ambitious and selfish project of stepping into her deceased brother's place, and of becoming the sole heiress of the house of Oxenham, chiefly coveting, and with an eager eye, the gold and lands.

With this view, assisted by the confessor of Sir Reginald, to whom she promised a large reward for the good of his monastery, she actually persuaded her father that, after having designed to give both his daughters to God, as nuns, should he now entirely withdraw the gift he would stand within the peril of the law of the Church, and would be liable to the penalty perhaps of death. She also prevailed with the confessor to say that, as Sir Reginald had lost his only son, he would be justified in retaining near his person, and to succeed to the rights of that son, his elder daughter Hilda; but Maud the younger, already designed for Heaven and the cell, must not be withheld to become secular here on earth.

Sir Reginald, who truly loved the gentle Maud, was grieved to the soul, as he listened to these arguments and counsels so artfully urged upon him, not only by the monk, but by Hilda, who did all she could to ingratiate herself into his favour, and to prejudice him against her sister.

At length the unhappy parent complied with the wishes and persuasions of his crafty confessor and his elder and selfish daughter; but, fearing to trust his resolution in the presence of Maud, who was lovely in person, of the gayest spirits, and most captivating manners, he caused her to be very suddenly conveyed away from his dwelling, without even seeing her, to bid her a last farewell, or to give her a father's blessing. Maud, greatly distressed by this cruelty, and well knowing, from all that had passed, she was indebted to the envy, the avarice, and the ambition of her sister Hilda, for being thus forced into a nunnery, for some time after her arrival at St. Bennet's gave herself up to despair, and behaved with almost frantic violence, so determined was she, if possible, to escape from the life-enduring imprisonment of the cell.

But it was all in vain; as far as this world was concerned, the gate of Hope had closed upon her with the convent doors. She had a stern abbess to deal with, a superstitious sisterhood, and a determined priest. Proper means, as they termed them, were taken to break the spirit of the unhappy and refractory novice. What those means were no one ever knew, for the walls and the cells of St. Bennet told no tales; and, after awhile, by the time Maud was allowed to see a friend now and then through the iron grating of the locutory, she was herself disposed to reveal nothing; for her spirit was in one sense broken and her whole heart changed. At first she had called on the help of Heaven as a refuge from despair; the call (so the abbess reported to Sir Reginald) had been graciously answered by the appearance of St. Bridget herself in a vision, who preached to her on patience, and from that hour of visitation Maud complained no more. Not only did she become resigned but cheerful in her resignation, obedient to the lady abbess, affectionate to all the nuns, and so exemplary in her piety, and in her works of love and charity, that, after the expiration of a year from the time she took the veil, she was allowed to become one of those nuns whose duty it was to attend upon the poor, the sick, and the dying in the neighbourhood.

In a short time she was so universally revered and beloved that she was known the country round as the good St. Maud; thus adding another and a living saint to the already numberless catalogue of such holy personages in Cornwall.

Hilda, who had thus far succeeded in all her views, now ruled like a petty tyrant in her father's halls; for he, good

man, sunk down with age and disappointment, and thinking how cruelly he had parted with the worthiest of his daughters, and in how stern a manner he had forced upon her the veil, against her will, cared little for what remained to him in this world, and, like a second Lear, lived to find, in a very great degree, the favour he had shown to Hilda requited only by her unkindness and neglect. So artfully had she contrived to manage his household, and to dismiss his old pages and varlets, on one pretence or another, that at last she had left the old man but one esquire about him, who was fondly attached to his master; and she, like another Regan, was preparing to say, "Wherefore one?" when Heaven decreed a complete change in her affairs, and vindicated its own insulted justice.

Hilda, not content with having been the cause of her sister Maud being forced into a convent, to become a nun against her will, felt so angered at the fame she had acquired in Cornwall, for her acts of love and charity by her title of saint, and by the comparison both rich and poor would often draw between herself, as the haughty heiress of a noble house, and her humble and pious sister, that she determined on a visit to the abbess of the convent in which Maud was vowed. By privately offering to pay a large sum of money annually for the benefit of the house, provided the abbess would henceforth keep Maud strictly and severely within her cell, and would not suffer her to go forth on such charitable missions, she endeavoured to put a stop to her being talked of as an object of praise or admiration, or being herself compared with the recluse in so disparaging a manner.

According to the custom of the time, Hilda set off on horseback to perform this journey to St. Bennet's. But, for obvious reasons, not wishing that the object of her journey should be known, she took with her not more than two or three armed and mounted followers, by way of guard. They were faithful, but their numbers were insufficient; they were attacked on their way near the convent gates by a band of robbers, who fancied such a noble lady as Hilda must be journeying with some rich offering to the shrine of St. Bennet.

Hilda (who was not wanting in some noble qualities, had she followed their dictates only, without listening to those of her passions, and her selfish ambition) was of a brave spirit. She encouraged her handful of men to a bold and determined resistance, by making one herself. The robbers,

unused to such resolution in a woman, and one so slightly attended, at length took to flight; but not till a blow, accidentally falling on her head, had stunned and brought her to the ground. She was taken up senseless and carried into the convent, where she lay for many days grievously hurt.

No sooner did Maud know the dangerous condition in which her sister was brought to the house than she hastened to her, and, with the most affectionate care, never for a moment quitted her side. Hilda, from the effects of her wound in the head, remained in so delirious and wandering a state that she knew no one till within a few hours of her decease. Then, and not till then, did she recognise Maud. Struck to the heart by the affectionate care her sister now displayed for one who had been to her so cruel an enemy, whose very mission to that house had alone been prompted by hatred and envy towards her, the fear of dying when engaged in an act that showed all the bitterness of her unreconciled feelings, altogether filled her soul with such horror that no language could describe her agony either of body or of mind.

The sight of Hilda whilst labouring under frenzy or delirium was less painful to the tender-hearted Maud than to see her now that her senses were restored to her. Another cause seemed likewise to prey on her mind with unmitigable bitterness—the love of the world and of all the vast wealth of which till this hour she had been the proud and triumphant possessor. All this was yet strong in her heart, nevertheless she wished to subdue it. The world and all its vain riches were about to leave her, and for ever; she now, therefore, would first leave them. She wished earnestly to repent. She struggled sore to obtain a right frame of mind even at this, the last hour. But it was no easy task, for all within her soul was horror, difficulty, and confusion.

Maud, in the gentlest manner, and with the truest piety, said all she could to comfort her, and to lead the thoughts of Hilda to a better and a calmer state, whilst she awaited but the return of the priest, then absent from the convent, to convey to the dying woman the hopes of Heaven and the forgiveness of the Church. But Heaven had been trifled with too long, and, ere these last consolations could reach the afflicted sinner, Hilda died, neither in peace with God nor man.

Maud was greatly distressed at the decease of her sister, but principally on account of her soul's health in that unseen

and mysterious state to which she had been consigned in so sudden and wretched a manner, from the want of time for repentance. Long and deeply did she deplore this great calamity, and that her sister had not sufficient warning to prepare herself for death. From the hour she had witnessed Hilda's terrible departure she made it her earnest and her daily prayer, not only for herself but for every member of the house of Oxenham, that, so long as one of their race should remain, there might be granted to each individual a sufficient warning to prepare for the great and awful change that awaits every human being. The prayers of the saints are never made in vain.

About five years after the death of Hilda and Sir Reginald (for he had survived his elder daughter only a few months), Maud, exhausted by her arduous labours in midnight prayers and daily charities, declined fast in health, and at length became grievously sick. One day whilst she was engaged in offering up with more than her usual energy this very petition, that a warning might be given to herself and her house before death, a bird of a beautiful and dove-like form (yet not so decided that its lineage could with certainty be known), the plumage of whose breast was white as the drifted snow, having something of brightness about it, as if it were illumined by rays of light purer than even those of the sun, came fluttering around her window, with outspread and agitated wings.

"Holy Mary, I thank thee! my prayer is heard!" exclaimed Maud. "Yonder bird comes as a winged messenger of Heaven to warn me that I shall soon depart this world. And now do I prophesy that henceforth, to the end of time, no member of the house of Oxenham shall ever see death without a white-breasted bird appearing as a signal of such approaching fate."

So spoke Saint Maud, in the inspiration of a spirit so good and pious. Shortly after she died in the odour of sanctity, and was buried within the convent-chapel of St. Bennet. A stone, with a dove carved upon it, her name, and the date of her decease, marked the spot where she was laid to her last rest; and from that time to the present, if the record of our ancient chronicler and the constant tale of tradition speak true, no member of the house of Oxenham ever departs this life without the previous warning visitation of this white-breasted and mysterious bird, that comes not only to the

individual himself but even sometimes to some one near or dear to him for whom the warning is designed. The last of our family—so have I been assured by my mother—to whom this intimation of approaching fate was given was my own infant brother, on the day previous to his death, when there was seen fluttering around his pillow, as the child lay in the cradle, the white-breasted bird of Oxenham.

CHAPTER X.

> What sudden anger's this? how have I reap'd it?
> He parted frowning from me, as if ruin
> Leap'd from his eyes.
>
> I'll not be made a soft and dull-eyed fool,
> To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield.
>
> SHAKSPERE.

Soon after Edmund had finished this tale, Dorothea was called out of the room. Edmund availed himself of the few short minutes her absence afforded for private discourse to implore me, in terms the most vehement, not to think of going to the ball in company with his rival, unless I wished to drive him to frenzy and despair; for to such a state of mind did he feel himself approximating that there were moments when he could not answer for what might be the consequence to himself did I go. He assured me he said this not to terrify me, but to warn me of the peril in which I stood, that I might be spared the bitter pangs of an unavailing regret when such would come too late.

Inexpressibly shocked at his words, I was about to reply—about to endeavour to convince him how utterly impossible it was I could have a choice in the matter, and that I must accompany, not the Colonel merely, but my stepmother, who was going to the ball,—but, ere I could give this explanation as fully as I could wish, I heard the rustle of my sister's gown as she approached the door, and was compelled to remain silent. I endeavoured, however, by my looks, and two or three words, as I said, "I dare not disobey," to make him understand the subject of my thoughts. But with what feelings did my eyes encounter those of Edmund, when I

read in every line of his pale and agitated countenance the traces of passions that were at once wild and deep!

All that evening I watched for an opportunity to speak to Edmund unobserved, but none offered. I knew it would be vain to write any remonstrance, even could I find an occasion to write unsuspected, and to convey it to his hands, since he was so predetermined I ought not to go.

That night I retired to bed, but not to sleep; and, after a thousand vague suggestions what to do, I at last resolved on speaking to my father, and imploring him to let me remain at home, and to send Dorothea with Lady Mooren, pleading that, as I really never could decide on giving my hand to Colonel Holborne, I ought not thus publicly to countenance his pretensions. I did speak to my father, but he grew impatient, and would not listen, insisting on my absolute obedience to his commands, and, suddenly leaving me, I sank down in the seat I had but just before quitted on his entrance into my apartment. With a heavy heart I took up some work to distract my thoughts, and, as I was thus engaged, not knowing what I did, Edmund stole upon me so softly, by a side door which my father had left open in his retreat, that I did not perceive his approach till his sudden appearance made me start, and the few words he spoke gave me so great a shock I was ready to sink down at his feet with affright.

"You are preparing for this ball," he said. "You will go, then, with Colonel Holborne? Beware—beware what you do! you are playing a dangerous part—trifling with your own honour, and with my life! Oh, Elizabeth, you have driven me to madness! I can endure no longer these torments—I may not live to upbraid you if you go! I will not answer for myself—for I am no longer myself."

Steps were heard without the chamber; and Edmund, wishing to avoid observation, instantly left me, and retreated through the side door where he had entered.

To describe the state of my mind from that hour till the one approached in which we were to set out for this unhappy ball would be impossible. I was no longer distracted; I was stupefied with my feelings and my fears. I did not even attempt any conjectures as to the steps I should take; I could think of none—decide on none. I spent the rest of that day in wandering from room to room in listless idleness, in the most wretched state of irresolution; some-

times fixed at my window, vainly watching for the return of Edmund, who I learnt from one of the servants had been observed to leave the house. Could I have seen Colonel Holborne, in the utter want of all counsel in my distress, I would have thrown myself on his generosity, and implored him not to ask me wherefore, but to go to Lady Millard's ball without coming to Moortown in the evening for either my stepmother or myself. But I saw neither Edmund nor the Colonel; and the hours, that will not delay their pace to prolong the day to the happy, nor yet speed it on to shorten it for the miserable, at last brought with them the evening, and all its train of wretchedness to me.

My maid came and warned me that it was time to dress; and that I should be late if I longer delayed. I suffered her to dress me; for I could not do the slightest thing for myself. My toilet was just finished when I heard something stir near my chamber-door, which opened on the long gallery, near the head of the great staircase. I bade my maid go and see who it was. She just opened the door, looked out, and then shut it, saying, she believed it was Mr. Edmund Oxenham.

"Stay here," I said, "and wait for me." I then rushed hastily from the chamber. Edmund stood on the landing, at the head of the great staircase, on that very spot where he had once before thrown himself in my way, in so agitated a manner, when he gave me the letter which first made known to me his most disastrous love. His looks were then alarming; but now they were terrible. I had often seen Edmund look wretched; but never till now had I seen him look lost—lost to himself, to reason; to all but a high-wrought impulse of despair. His face was pale as death, the eye upraised but dim, the lips ashy white, every feature agitated as if convulsed, yet there was a rigidity in the attitude in which he stood (for he never moved a step to meet me, whilst the limbs appeared shaken with tremor) as if a deadening touch of palsy had passed over his whole frame.

I was dressed in my ball attire. He looked upon me with an expression that seemed to speak his wonder, as he uttered but a few words, twice repeated; but O, Heaven! with what a tone! They came like the knell of death upon my ear, for that tone spoke despair. "You will go, then," he said, "you will go, then!"—and, rushing down the stairs, instantly left me.

Alarmed for Edmund's life; to preserve that from injury —the worst of all injuries (for indeed I feared it), all other fears, all other considerations now sunk into nothing before this. I was no longer irresolute; I was determined to act. Not even the awe of my father's presence, nor the terrors of his anger, crossed my mind. Nothing seemed, even for a moment, worth weighing in opposition to Edmund's safety. Let the sacrifice be what it would, I cared not—I would save him. All the thousand terrors which had for months overawed and caused me to act so irresolutely, so clandestinely, now sunk into insignificance; they were not worth a moment's thought. My mind was made up for any avowal, any hazard, so that I might preserve him from the consequences of such impassioned frenzy.

With this resolution I rushed down the great stairs. I scarcely felt the ground as I crossed the hall; not a tear was in my eye, not a timid feeling in my bosom. I was all courage; and, though I drew my breath quickly, I was yet calm, because my purpose was determined. I was raised by the strength of my own resolution above all fear.

I never paused till I reached the chamber called the Paradise chamber. There, leaning against the wainscot near the door, noticing no one, and being noticed by no one, stood Edmund; evidently waiting the result with the fixed purpose of a mind in despair, maddened by a spirit of the most fearful jealousy. To what extremities of cruelty, of dire distress, will not the passions lead, when they throw off the restraints that reason and religion would oppose to their headlong career! There stood Edmund, the pale image of despair.

Remote from him, and at the further extremity of the apartment, were assembled round the fire my father, my stepmother, and Dorothea. Colonel Holborne stood near the virginals from which Dorothea had just risen; she had been playing to pass the time till I was dressed. On seeing me enter the Colonel advanced some steps, and with a pleased and smiling countenance was about to greet me when my stepmother looked at me sternly, and said, "You are late, Elizabeth, in dressing; we have all waited." My father also said something, I know not what it was, to the same effect, in a tone of displeasure.

I heard a sigh of agony burst as from the very heart of Edmund as my father spoke; no ear but mine, I believe,

caught it. But to me, whose every faculty was alive and watchful for the least sign of that distress which seemed to have unsettled the very brain of Edmund, that sigh was not lost. It fell clear and distinct upon my ear, as if to warn me no longer to delay giving relief to the unhappy being whose very life, perhaps, hung on my next word. I hastened to speak it. "I am *not* going to the ball," I said, in a clear, firm, and even raised voice, turning slightly towards Edmund, that I might be sure he would hear and understand what I said without the fear of misapprehension. "I am not going to the ball," I repeated.

Even amidst the surprise, the anger, the confusion, the many voices which my plain-spoken declaration called out against me, I could catch the sound of a second sigh that burst from the bosom of Edmund, as if to give relief to his overburdened breast, on hearing my words. I cannot repeat, for I was scarcely capable of understanding, the reproaches, the rage, the commands that were poured out upon me by all but Colonel Holborne. He stood looking at me with astonishment, and seeming by his air to ask an explanation, not as a favour, but as a right.

Speaking at hazard, I said I was ill, and could not go; and sat down upon a chair that was near, for indeed I could hardly stand.

"Ill!" exclaimed my stepmother. "Very sudden, truly, is this illness! Pray how long have you been ill? It has not prevented your dressing, I see. What ails you?"

"She is not too ill to go, and shall go," said my father, bluntly, and in an angry tone; "Colonel Holborne shall not be thus played with. Elizabeth, I command you to accompany Lady Mooren and Colonel Holborne to this ball. What has caused this strange caprice? what has caused you to alter your intentions since you came into this chamber?"

"I did not intend to go before I came into this chamber," I replied. "Indeed, I cannot go."

"For what purpose did you dress, then?" said my stepsister, with a sneer.

"I must beg some explanation," said Colonel Holborne. "Have I been so unfortunate as to give you any offence, or to endanger that long-continued favour on which I have ventured to build the fondest hope?"

"Colonel Holborne," said my father, "do not you trouble yourself about my daughter. The affair is now between her

and myself—between father and daughter—obedience or disobedience. She shall go, for I command it."

Sir Arthur advanced, as if to raise me from my seat, and lead me to Colonel Holborne. I started up, and, not knowing what to do or where to turn at this crisis, I said to Dorothea, who was near me, "O, sister, sister! if you have the feelings of a sister, or of a friend for one of your own sex, who is lost unless you will help her, follow me, and speak with me alone." I snatched up a taper that burnt on a side-table, and led the way. Dorothea followed in silence, with looks more of wonder than of malice at this moment in her face.

Dorothea was the last person in whom, under any less desperate circumstances, I should have chosen to place confidence; or from whom I should have sought counsel, at such a crisis. But I was driven to my last shift; I knew not which way to turn; and my despair and not my choice made me turn to her, even as a distressed vessel steers towards an enemy's port when threatened with shipwreck. If fear often makes us cowards, it as often perhaps makes us bold. I, who, but an hour before, should have viewed the possibility of Dorothea knowing the fatal engagement that existed between Edmund and myself with indescribable dread, as a thing fraught with ruin to us both, was now about to make her acquainted with it myself, and that in the most fearful light, surrounded by all its circumstances of error, of apprehension, and of dread.

But, having resolved on this, I could not stay to ponder on the means. The fact of the confession was enough. I cared not to give with the confession any attempts at mitigation, any softenings of the truth.

I led the way to a small adjoining apartment. No sooner was the door closed than, turning to the astonished Dorothea, before she could say one word, I exclaimed, as calmly as I could compel myself to speak, whilst my heart throbbed as if it would burst my bosom, "Dorothea, if you would save the life of a fellow-creature, if you would save Edmund from destruction, give me your assistance—go, instead of me, to this ball. If I go with Colonel Holborne, under present circumstances, Edmund Oxenham, I fear, will not live to see our return. He loves me; we are engaged to each other; and his feelings, long tortured by anxiety, doubt, and suspense, have at length wrought his mind to a frenzy of jealous passion. If I go, death follows—I am convinced it will be so;

it will then be too late for regrets:—reasoning, reproaches, remonstrance are of no avail in moments such as these. I am determined no earthly power shall compel me to move one step to this ball. Save me then, dear Dorothea; pity me; save me from the consequences of my own folly; from my father's indignation; from your mother's anger—save Edmund, and may God bless you for the good deed! Plead for me; speak to your mother; go yourself, instead of me, and all will be well."

As I spoke this with the most rapid utterance, Dorothea stood lost in wonder and amazement. Anger, disappointment, envy, jealousy—all those evil passions which it may be supposed one of her disposition would feel for a step-sister she had never regarded, and who she found had won the heart of, and had pledged her hand to, the man she had herself loved and who had slighted her, now took possession of her bosom. The few words she addressed to me spoke the gall and bitterness such a discovery of the truth was to a mind so prejudiced and so disposed.

Yet, in the midst of all this, the confidence I had placed in her pleased her; for she was very proud and self-opinionated, and delighted in being called in to settle all the family affairs. She did, also, feel sufficient interest for Edmund, notwithstanding his previous slights, to wish to preserve him from the danger in which he now stood from his own disturbed and almost frantic state of feeling. She let me know that she had observed, for the last three or four days, his demeanour and his looks, and had herself entertained fears for his reason. She avowed, also, that she had long suspected his love for me, but had not suspected mine for him; and never even imagined his affection had dared venture on a declaration; far less, then, did she dream of an engagement. On the whole, however, though she treated me, even in these moments, with little feeling or sympathy, and could not help throwing out some of her habitual sneers, she behaved better than I expected; and undertook to speak both to her mother and my father, to prevent my going to Lady Millard's unfortunate ball; for that purpose she left me, and returned to the Paradise parlour.

How little did I foresee the manner in which she would there conduct herself! It appeared that, without the slightest sense of delicacy for the feelings, either of poor Edmund or Colonel Holborne, she at once boldly repeated to them

what had just passed between her and myself, in all points except my fears for Edmund's life. You may readily conjecture what followed. I could not describe it. In the midst of such an outbreak of stormy passions, I was neither calm nor collected enough to be capable of very minutely observing all that passed.

All I can distinctly tell you is that, after Dorothea had left me to myself and had returned to the adjoining chamber, I heard voices high and loud, as if engaged in angry discussion; and then I could distinguish a low, continued utterance, as if some one in deep sorrow spoke. I was convinced that Edmund was the last sorrowful speaker. I was at length summoned to attend in the Paradise apartment, and prepared to obey the command.

CHAPTER XI.

She is peevish, sullen, froward,
Proud, disobedient, stubborn, lacking duty;
Neither regarding that she is my child,
Nor fearing me, as if I were her father.

SHAKSPERE.

On entering, the most extraordinary scene presented itself to my view. My father—surprised, vexed, yet still feeling, in the midst of all his anger, that to break for ever with Edmund was a thing not to be thought of, even in these moments—was variously swayed, and seemed sorely and grievously perplexed. Yet, as on no consideration would he give his sanction to Edmund's pretensions, so likewise would he on no account suffer that at his command I should deny my company to Colonel Holborne, and remain at home. It seemed that, before I was summoned, my father had declared his disapprobation of the one, and his favour towards the other, in respect to me; whilst my stepmother had burst upon Edmund in a strain of inveterate reproach for having availed himself of my father's friendship to the injury of his child in regard to her duty.

For myself, I was so severely taken to task that, conscious as I was how irresolutely, if not cruelly, I had acted, I could do nothing but weep; whilst the little that Edmund was permitted to say was aimed at excusing me, and taking all

the blame upon himself. As for Colonel Holborne, he stood with folded arms, leaning against the wall, looking proudly composed, and only said, "I am glad of it. I am glad it has come to this. There must now be an end to irresolution. Let to-night decide the question; Mr. Oxenham or myself must give place. Let it then be seen whose will this lady will obey—her father's or this gentleman's. I will not interfere till I know I have an accredited authority to do so, till I feel I have a right to do so, but not one gained clandestinely. Mine shall be an open and direct course. Madam," continued the Colonel, speaking with some asperity to me, "pray do not consider me—do not say I influence you. Act under a more legitimate direction than I can at present have the honour, in any way, to plead in relation to yourself. I only beg decision."

I stood like a statue, still weeping, but incapable of action, not knowing where to turn, what to say, or what to do. For how could I resolve on doing that which would drive Edmund to despair? And yet how impossible was it I could tell Colonel Holborne the confidential communication my father had made to me about himself, the Colonel, and his affairs!

Dorothea saw my dreadful state of embarrassment, my irresolution. I am sure she saw it, and, as if to make matters even yet more difficult for me at this crisis, on hearing my father say to Colonel Holborne, by way of excuse for me, "that I was but a young and foolish girl, who had been led into an engagement which he would never sanction, and therefore it must end," she added: "that she could not help thinking Edmund was quite in the right in one respect. Certainly, whilst I was under an engagement to him he had a right to insist I should not give my company to a rival suitor; but she hoped I should be excused, seeing how young I was, and how thoughtless."

Dorothea's apology for me was artfully malicious, and served only to call up in my bosom a feeling of indignant resentment, instead of thankfulness and gratitude; and bitterly did I repent the rash and injudicious confidence I had reposed in her. I saw the extreme folly there was in my having fancied that any circumstances could make a selfish, arrogant, and ungenerous character act contrary to its nature.

I could not help glancing an indignant look on Dorothea, yet was I too much distressed and overcome by a sense of

fear and awe to utter a word that might provoke her. On the contrary—as she chose, a minute or two afterwards, to come up to me and ask me what she could do to prevent further mischief—(the Colonel and Edmund were exchanging angry looks and short words that were of no good augury) —I said to her softly, "Beg my father to speak kindly to Edmund, to show some pity to his feelings, for, indeed, I am most to blame. If the Colonel and Edmund are suffered to continue this angry discourse, there may be bloodshed——"

"There may be bloodshed, indeed," she replied.

"Oh, prevent it!" cried I, "interfere for peace, for only you can. I can do nothing."

"I will," she said, in a tone that indicated a better feeling; for a love of power, and the admission that she could alone exercise it with effect, acted on her spirit even as oil upon the stormy waves around the tempest-tossed vessel, for awhile allaying their fury.

Dorothea spoke apart earnestly with my father, and then led both him and Edmund out of the room. During this absence, how often did my eye wander to the broad dial-plate of the old clock that stood on the opposite side of the room, whilst I was kept in such an agony of suspense! In about half an hour my father and Edmund returned. In the countenance of my father there was a composed air—grave, resolute, but not anxious; and when he spoke there was something in the accents of his voice that told of softened feelings. Some conversation had passed, I thought, that had recalled to my father's remembrance his deceased son; how Edmund had served him, and that remembrance had touched his heart. In Edmund, though deep dejection and wounded feeling were evident in every line of his expressive countenance—though it was still pale as death—yet was it composed; all agitation had ceased. I felt reassured on his account, and internally blessed God for this reassurance.

We were all silent, and all present turned to my father, to hear what doom he would pronounce on the child and the friend who had so offended.

"Colonel Holborne," he said, "I first address myself to you, because I feel an explanation is due to you in every way, both as my friend and as a gentleman whose pretensions to my daughter have met with my sanction. Under the present circumstances of the times I would not press for her decision, since, whilst the country is plunged into this

state of civil strife, it is not a time for giving or taking in marriage. To you, therefore, I promise nothing more than I have already promised—my sanction to your union with Elizabeth, if at a future period you can prevail with her to confirm it, when I trust no public quarrels may divide us. In the interval, the cause you have espoused, the opposition of our principles as well as parties, must, in a very short time, separate us, but I trust not for ever. Nor is it fitting with my sense of duty to the King, and yours to the Parliament, now in open rebellion against him, that we should any longer hold such frequent intercourse as our private feelings and affections would make welcome to both. But of this, Colonel Holborne, be assured: if present or absent, if my private friend or my public foe, if peace or if war prevail, I never can forget the debt of gratitude by which I am for ever bound to you. I here most solemnly avow it, before God and this company; by me it shall never be forgotten, to you my word shall never be broken, you know what I mean, and all I mean. My word is pledged, and with no man but yourself shall my daughter ever wed, with my consent."

He grasped the Colonel's hand as he spoke, who seemed deeply moved by these assurances. There was a pause; and my father, addressing Edmund, continued: "Mr. Oxenham, I will neither pain you nor myself by here repeating what has just passed between us. I hope we have heard each other with temper, certainly with good will, and I bless God we are friends." He wrung Edmund's hand as he spoke.

"Colonel Holborne," said my father, "this gentleman has dealt by me with much candour; he has confessed all; his error has been one of the judgment. He formed an early and imprudent attachment for Elizabeth, and was so injudicious as to conceal it from me, with the intention to declare it hereafter, when circumstances should be more favourable to his worldly fortunes. He has inconsiderately led my daughter into an engagement with him. But, I rejoice to say, by his own candid avowal, such betrothal is conditional, as it extended not to any claim upon her, unless sanctioned by myself. I can release her; I have, therefore, this night set her free by refusing my consent to Mr. Oxenham. For the rest, though I cannot look on Edmund as my son, in that view he would most desire I should, yet in my affections he is as a second son to me; for I can neither forget the services he has rendered to the living, nor the dead, in my family.

Yet am I most unfortunate. To both of you am I bound by ties of gratitude, of affection; I am willing to requite the debt I owe to both, yet I can fully satisfy neither."

My father seemed so much overcome by his feelings that Colonel Holborne and Edmund were both sensibly moved, and assured him how much they felt for the painful situation in which he stood, and how convinced they were of his earnest desire to act justly and kindly to both.

"Edmund," said my father, "has also another claim upon me, to which you, Colonel Holborne, cannot be a stranger; he is united with me in the cause of loyalty to the King. This is a bond which no circumstances can ever break between us, and we must strive in it together; if all hopes of peace fail, we may fall in it together. You, Colonel Holborne, may be the victor, and we no more. Should such be the case, I know you will become as the father, the husband, the friend, to these who now surround me: they will need a friend."

Colonel Holborne, never slow in answering any call on his generosity of spirit, assured my father that, if he survived him, he would never, under any circumstances, disappoint the confidence now reposed in him.

"I believe it," said my father, "for you are a brave man; I wish you had a better cause, and that in matters of public opinion we were as agreed as we are in those of a more private nature. I have, however, an earnest request to make that is very near my heart, and you shall not deny it me. It is, though the cause you have espoused may compel you to be the enemy of Edmund in the field, yet that in private, you will forbear all quarrel with him. And for you, Edmund, let me entreat you to remember that the friendship you have so long entertained for me and mine is best proved in its sincerity by respecting my will towards my child, and by forbearing all occasion of private quarrel between you and Colonel Holborne. You may meet hereafter in the field, yet may Heaven avert it by once more restoring Charles in peace to the throne, and this unhappy country to unity with itself! And remember your duty to the King must shortly take place of all other obligations. We shall find, alas! but too many causes of public strife; let us not, then, quarrel among ourselves, for scarcely as a people, or as a family, can our prospects be more unhappy than they now are. Come, gen-

tleman, give me the satisfaction to see you bear no enmity to each other. Let me join your hands."

Colonel Holborne and Edmund did shake hands, yet I saw the action on both sides was but constrained, mechanical, and that no cordiality of feeling accompanied it.

My father turned to me. "Elizabeth," he said, "I expect from you the obedience of a daughter. And, as a proof that I shall expect it, and that I will allow no one, however dear to me in friendship, to usurp my authority as a father, I command you to accompany this night Lady Mooren and Colonel Holborne to this foolish woman, Lady Millard's, foolish ball. Do not start, Mr. Oxenham: my daughter goes now in obedience to me. The coach waits."

Thus ended this distressful scene, certainly, in one respect, more happily than I had anticipated; for my father's anger had been more easily soothed than I had dared to hope it would be; and Edmund saw me depart for the ball (fully satisfied I could not avoid going with his rival) with a melancholy calmness that spoke a mind resigned, at least for the present, to what was inevitable. Yet I knew well, by the look of earnest entreaty, almost of tender reproach, which he gave me, as I ventured to bid him kindly a Good even, that, in his heart, he had no more resigned all hope for the future than he had laid aside his tenacious jealousy of the Colonel, to whom he bowed haughtily, in return to his more cordial farewell, as we quitted the room. Edmund would not follow, but turned to Dorothea, as if he were disposed to welcome, in the very despair of the hour, the kindness she was evidently rejoiced to have him thus compelled to receive from herself alone.

We arrived at Lady Millard's in safety. Notwithstanding the aspect of the times, and the difference of opinion entertained by the many who were present, all was brilliant, all was gay; for, though many who had a strong leaning to the Parliament had been invited, not one of the rigid Sectarians of the day would accept the invitation to such an assembly. But, O! with what a heart of misery do the children of pleasure sometimes enter on its scenes! That night was to me one of torture. The hours that sped away so swiftly with all but my unhappy self seemed with me to hang on leaden wings, as if they would never take their flight to usher in the morning.

I knew not how to behave towards Colonel Holborne. I dared not suffer him to suspect the truth, because, in doing so, I must have betrayed the confidence of my father. I must have let him know the motives which induced Sir Arthur so earnestly to desire to keep alive his hopes. And yet, as I never meant hereafter to confirm them, by the gift of my hand, I dared not be so disingenuous now as to encourage his pretensions. Judge of my embarrassment, of the difficult part I had to sustain. It was more, however, in reference to the future than the present that I felt the difficulty. The company, the friends, the acquaintances, who came to me and talked to me, or danced with me (for the Colonel never danced), the gaiety, the music, altogether, without my sedulously seeking it, served to keep me a good deal aloof from the Colonel, and from any very particular attentions during the whole of that miserable evening. My mind, however, was so preoccupied, that, although at Lady Millard's ball in person, I was still at Moortown in spirit, and I seemed to see nothing present so vividly as the party and all the painful circumstances I had just left there. Above all, did the pale and distracted countenance of the impassioned Edmund still haunt me. Turn where I would, I seemed to meet his tender and melancholy eye fixed on me with a mournful expression, as if to upbraid me for having suffered love, such as his, to grow to such a height, and now to meditate its destruction! It seemed to ask me what I (who had encouraged and responded to his affection) did there, in that scene of gaiety, with his too happy rival, leaving him to experience all the agonies of doubt and fear for the future.

At length, to my great relief, the hour of departure came. My stepmother was almost as much wearied with the evening's amusements, and its painful vicissitudes, as myself; neither of us could talk; and Colonel Holborne, who was grave and thoughtful, seemed as little disposed to converse as ourselves. In silence, therefore, we arrived at Moortown and immediately after retired to rest.

It was, though a matter of surprise, yet one of great comfort to me, on entering the breakfast-room the next morning, to find the Colonel was gone. It appeared that, whilst we were absent on the previous evening, a messenger had arrived with letters from the Earl of Stamford, directing the Colonel

to attend him forthwith at Exeter. In consequence of these orders, before any of the family, except my father, was stirring, Colonel Holborne had bidden him a hasty but kindly farewell. He had quitted Moortown, very doubtful as to when his public duties would allow him to return to it. As on all occasions, he behaved with generosity, feeling deeply himself, but willing, as far as he could do so, to spare the feelings of others; on being asked by my father whether he would wish to see me, Colonel Holborne only waved his hand in silence, and departed. That day I had an opportunity of seeing Edmund in the garden unobserved. I found him so far resigned to circumstances, for the present, that he was content things should remain as they were; because, from what my father and himself had that morning heard, he doubted not the war would soon break out in the West, in such a manner as to render all private affairs of a very secondary import, and any immediate settlement of them inconsistent not only with public duty but with common prudence. Knowing, as he did, my avowed objections to his rival, that I had wilfully given him no encouragement, that all which had passed had been forced on me by circumstances, whilst my heart and my promise had alone been his, he still persisted that, if he lived, he would never resign his hopes of me; and he doubted not but, some time hence, a change in affairs might befriend him, and my father might be brought to alter his present purpose, and give his consent to our union, when he found our hearts could never be estranged. In reply to this, I said all which duty to my father, reason, and probability could suggest, to show how vain were such expectations and such hopes. But he would scarcely hear me out, and rashly and passionately, but most solemnly, vowed that nothing but his death, or my own change of feeling in favour of another, should ever induce him to resign his hopes.

I have only to add to this part of my narrative that the war soon after broke out with great fury in the West. My father and Edmund, with the Royalist gentlemen around us, acted in concert: and, what with the zealous watchfulness of my stepmother and Dorothea, and the incessant hurry of public affairs, I had no opportunity for any further remonstrance or conversation with Edmund.

I pass in silence all those disastrous events, those scenes

of war and misery, which the quarrel between Charles and his Parliament at this time brought into Cornwall and Devon, since they are as well known to you as to myself. For nearly six months, Sir Arthur Mooren and Edmund Oxenham were engaged together in the duties of the field; where, by their undaunted courage and their devoted loyalty, both achieved an honourable fame. They were both wounded, though not dangerously; and at the battle of Broadoak Down my father saved Edmund's life during the heat of the action. Edmund was looked upon as a young man full of enterprise and spirit. My father, though equally brave, was of far more coolness and deliberation in matters of counsel and debate, so that he was speedily raised to the rank of a colonel; whilst Edmund remained in that which he originally held, as captain in one of the volunteer regiments. During their absence, Lady Mooren, Dorothea, and myself, were at Moortown, attended by a sufficient number of armed servants and followers; but no attack was yet made, or even apprehended, on our house.

CHAPTER XII.

I'll do whate'er thou wilt; I will be silent;
But, O! a reined tongue and bursting heart
Are hard at once to bear.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

All comfort go with thee,
For none abides with me; my joy is—death.

SHAKSPERE.

MANY houses had been stormed and taken by the Roundheads in our immediate vicinity; and we soon perfectly well understood that we were indebted for our safety not only to the forbearance of Colonel Holborne, but to his powerful influence in our behalf in some high quarter; for we learnt, from private intelligence, that our house was named with a few others to be spared, as being inhabited by women only, who could do no harm to the Parliamentary forces, nor be any let to their cause.

Had my father and Edmund stayed away from home, or continued to act only in the field, Colonel Holborne (as he afterwards assured us himself) would still have been able to

protect us. But my father, feeling the effects of his hard service, and Edmund being in a weak state from the quantity of blood he had lost at the time he received his wound, they both imprudently returned to Moortown, in the hope such return would be unsuspected by the enemy, and that, by staying at home for two or three weeks to recruit their strength, they could also, whilst there, find leisure to complete some secret plans and negociations they were carrying on for the service of the King, with Prince Rupert and other Royalists, then at Bristol; principally with the view of retaking the city of Exeter for King Charles. Moortown, though walled and capable of defence, from the circumstances I have mentioned, was not well prepared for it; so that when the news came that, by the express command of the Earl of Stamford, a body of Parliamentarians was coming against us, we were not only surprised but vexed beyond measure, that, relying on the known favour of Colonel Holborne, we had been so imprudent as not fully to prepare for our defence.

Still my father and Edmund resolved to hold out the old house, as well as they could, to the last, though they knew, unless we could make terms, that necessity would compel a surrender in the course of a very few days, as we had neither arms, ammunition, nor food sufficient to sustain a prolonged siege. To complete our dismay, we speedily found that the leader of this formidable array against us was Colonel Holborne himself!—Colonel Holborne, who knew, as perfectly as we did, the real state of things, and that we must yield to him, do what we could to make a show of resistance. It soon, however, appeared Colonel Holborne came resolved to make the most generous use he could of the knowledge he possessed of our affairs, consistent with the duty he owed to the cause he had espoused.

Not to detain you with any unnecessary details, suffice it to say that our attempts at defence were as futile as we expected, and that, had we to deal with a less friendly foe, Moortown House, in all probability, would have been taken ere the close of the third day—burned, pillaged, and its wretched inhabitants put to the sword. But not such was its fate under our most generous victor. Finding, by the gradual decrease of our discharge of musketry, and of a couple of minion drakes we had mounted on our walls, that our ammunition was nearly spent, Colonel Holborne sent to

our gates a flag of truce and a trumpet, demanding a parley. It is needless to add that it was instantly granted, and the Colonel himself came to propose and negotiate the terms of our surrender. Sir Arthur and Edmund were closeted with him alone.

Soon after, my father came to us women, who were anxiously awaiting the result of the negotiation in the Paradise parlour. He told us that Colonel Holborne had proved himself to be the most generous of conquerors; and that the terms he had proposed were at once merciful and honourable; and as lenient as the duty he owed to the Parliament would admit. All the arms of our men were to be surrendered; and a certain number of the enemy's troop quartered in our house. No injury was to be offered to our persons or our property, of any kind; we women were to be at liberty to stay where we were, or to go where we pleased. My father and Edmund were to be held prisoners of war, on their parole, till the pleasure of the Earl of Stamford, under whose orders Colonel Holborne had acted, could be known respecting them. The Colonel intimated that he believed his influence was not inconsiderable with the Earl of Stamford, and that he hoped to get them off on the payment of a fine for their malignancy. For the present, and till such time as he could hear from the Earl, he should take up his quarters at Moortown, for the double purpose of protecting us, and of watching the movements of some Royalists, who were likely to intercept the progress of a body of the Parliamentary forces now on their way for the reinforcement of Exeter, at that time threatened with assault for the purpose of retaking it for the King.

You may suppose, Paulina, with what feelings we heard Colonel Holborne say in the evening that he was glad neither Sir Arthur Mooren nor Captain Oxenham had meddled in that affair, as, if they had, it would be no easy task to procure mitigation of their punishment. All we could hope was that the correspondence my father and Edmund had carried on, in furtherance of the plan for the deliverance of Exeter to the King, might pass undetected. Some days elapsed, and Colonel Holborne received no answer; a thing that a good deal alarmed us, as it looked like delay for the purpose of investigation and inquiry.

During this painful interval, in all points (save those

which immediately touched on his duty), Colonel Holborne insisted on my father still living and acting as master of his own house, and once more made himself his guest. So much was there of true delicacy in his truly generous mind, that now, when we dared refuse him nothing, he would not so much as hint at his suit to me; nor did he pay me any more than ordinary marks of attention; except that now and then a look or a word dropped, as it were, unbidden from his lips, spoke his still unchanged and ardent love. Noble in his conduct towards his rival, now his prisoner, he always conducted himself towards him with the most disinterested magnanimity; forbearing even his very looks of kindness to me, in Edmund's presence, because he was too generous to triumph over or insult the feelings of one who was so completely within his power.

Would that Edmund could have seen his generosity in the same light that I did! But his judgment and his sense of justice were alike clouded by the dark mists which doubt and jealousy had cast over his mind; so that even the very virtues of Colonel Holborne were changed, when viewed through the gloom of his most unconquerable prejudices. The Colonel's generosity, he affirmed, was the result of artifice to work on my feelings for his own ends; and the warm expression of thankfulness which his conduct drew forth, as gratitude filled my whole heart, was deemed as an indication of altered feelings in myself, and as an encouragement of his rival's hopes and views.

But, though I pitied Edmund's errors, and very greatly excused them, knowing well his character, his deep passions, the rash conclusions, and the tortures of fear and doubt that gave them birth, yet was I determined that he should neither make me unjust nor ungrateful; and as long as Colonel Holborne preserved such a true magnanimity of spirit, and of conduct in respect to us all, so long would I let the Colonel see I felt its value and knew how to respect it.

On the fourth day after our capture, in the midst of a somewhat angry dialogue on this subject between Edmund and myself (when for a few minutes he found the opportunity to speak to me unobserved), I was called out of the room by my old and faithful servant. She put a letter into my hand. I broke the seal hastily: the contents were a few lines from Colonel Holborne. He requested me to do him the favour to

allow him a short and private audience, in my own closet, as he had something to communicate of the highest importance, which it was absolutely necessary should be told to me alone. Much alarmed by this paper, I bade my maid tell the Colonel I would on the instant attend him; and I bade her bring him as privately as possible to the apartment he had named. The Colonel came; I bade my maid (whom I knew I could trust) watch without, that no one might interrupt us. The Colonel closed the door, and we were alone.

The moment I looked up in his countenance I was convinced that something very unusual had occurred, as there was in it an expression of agitated feeling, most unusual with Colonel Holborne, who was remarkable for preserving a calm demeanour under almost any circumstances of doubt or pain. I knew nothing had happened concerning myself to vex him; the thought then at once flashed across my mind—it must be some distressing intelligence about my father that he had to communicate. A messenger, who not an hour before had been with the Colonel, must have been the bearer of it. Alarmed in the extreme by this idea, I spoke my fears by a few words, exclaiming—"O! Colonel Holborne, what is it you would tell me? I fear the worst for my father!"

"Indeed," he replied, "I grieve to say it, you have but too just cause: I am distressed at the news I have to communicate to him."

"He does not yet know it, then?" I said.

"No," answered the Colonel; "I would not tell him until I had first consulted with you, because—I will be frank with you—time presses; I am compelled to be thus abrupt, and to dispense with all ceremony, because I first wish to consult with you, as I think that, should you now give your sanction to the only means by which it appears possible that I can interfere to save your father, he may yet be saved. For O, Elizabeth! I must not conceal from you the truth, the Earl of Stamford demands nothing less than your father's life! He demands that I should send to him forthwith your father and Captain Oxenham as prisoners, and if I do so the death of both is certain, for strange discoveries have come to light."

"O, heavens!" I exclaimed; and, overcome by the shock of this sudden and terrible communication, I sank down on a chair, nearly fainting. The Colonel, alarmed at my con-

dition, took my hand within his, and said, "I am too rough, too abrupt. Yet, believe me, not for all this world could offer would I distress you did I know how to avoid it. But endeavour to compose yourself and all may yet be well."

"Did you not say," I replied, as soon as I could sufficiently recover myself for speech, "did you not say that I could save my father? I will do anything, sanction anything, so I may but preserve his life. And Edmund Oxenham—did you not say that he too was in danger?"

"Yes, their danger is equal, for their guilt is so. Pardon me the word, it was unwittingly spoken, but you know what is virtue with the Royalists is not held to be such with those who are unhappily opposed to them. Thus the matter stands. I have this day received the commands of my General, the Earl of Stamford, to give up my prisoners without delay to him; as it appears that some false friend to the Royal cause who has lately fallen into the Earl's power, to save himself, has betrayed a most important secret, and put into Stamford's hands papers of the utmost consequence, with which he was entrusted in order to convey them to Prince Rupert, now at Bristol. Among these were found letters from your father and Edmund Oxenham, clearly showing that they were the originators of the plot, and about to become the leaders of an enterprise to retake Exeter for the King. The Earl of Stamford, who feels much respect both for Sir Arthur Mooren and Captain Oxenham, as brave men and gentlemen of honour, adds, that it deeply grieves him to think he must, to strike others with awe, make these gentlemen an example; that he must, by the power vested in him, condemn them to death for having been detected in these practices—treasonable practices to the Parliament. I am called on to yield them up this very day; the Earl of Stamford is now stationed within eighteen miles of Moortown. I fear, if once in his hands, that neither your father nor Captain Oxenham will live to see to-morrow's sun."

"But you will not yield them up; you will not!" I said frantically.

"You know not what you require of me," replied Colonel Holborne. "I am under the command of the Earl of Stamford, and I have no choice. Did I refuse them I could not save them."

"O! what, what is to be done?" I said. "You talked of

saving them but now—of saving them would I but consent to some plan. Tell me what it is—tell me! I would consent, and gladly, to forfeit my own life to preserve theirs."

"I will tell you," he said, "frankly, plainly tell you. But, for your own sake, for theirs, endeavour to hear me with less emotion, or this extreme agitation will unfit you not only to hear, but to do what must be done, would you preserve their lives."

I promised I would endeavour to be calm; I made the effort to be so, and I became sufficiently collected to listen with attention, and to interrupt the Colonel as little as possible in all he had to propose. The substance of it was as follows:—

Colonel Holborne began by assuring me that there was, as he had already shown me, no alternative on his part; and, if he should now propose to me what would seem to involve in it his own interest, he begged me to believe that it proceeded from no wish to take advantage of the perilous situation in which I stood, but simply because there were no other means within his power; none by which he could have any possible claims on the Earl of Stamford, so as to prevail with him to give up his fatal purpose. Even what he had to propose might fail, but there was no other attempt to be made, no other way for hope. He paused.

"Tell me what it is," I said—"I conjure you, tell me without further pause. I am convinced all you say is truth. I know you to be too generous to be selfish, and that the simplest assertion made by you is always true. I need no more assurances of the honour and the disinterestedness of your soul."

Colonel Holborne seemed touched by my words. "I thank you, madam," he said; "I thank you. I hope I may prove myself not altogether unworthy your generous trust in my honour. I know what I have to propose is replete with difficulty. I fear it must be offensive to your feelings; yet, let what may be the fate of Edmund Oxenham, if you comply, I think I can save your father—for his friend I cannot feel so assured."

"Oh, do not say it," I exclaimed; "do not speak of Edmund's death!" And, forgetful of all else but his immediate danger, carried away by that strong impulse which sometimes prompts us to reveal a hidden truth before we can

consult our judgment, in the agony of my fears for his life, I threw myself on my knees before Colonel Holborne, seized his hand, and, as the tears gushed from my eyes, exclaimed, with the passionate accents of distress, "Oh, do not give up the hope that you may save him! Do not—do not give up his cause! Do not doom Edmund to death, and me with him!"

Colonel Holborne started, his countenance changed, and he looked on me for a moment with an expression of displeasure and surprise. "How!" he said; "what is this? Edmund, then, is dear to you, and you *do* love him?"

No longer capable of concealment—indeed, no longer desiring it—I replied, "I love him more than life!"

Colonel Holborne was so startled, so overcome by this plain avowal of my affection for his rival, that for some moments he could not speak. He evidently struggled to keep down his rising indignation. After a strong effort at self-command, he at length said, "Have my feelings then been played with—have they been your sport? And am I only now to know the truth when I can be made the instrument to serve Captain Oxenham? Why have I been thus trifled with, and why thus deceived?"

"You have never wilfully been deceived by me," I said; "you know my father gave me no choice. I have ever honoured and respected you too much to wish you should be deceived on my account."

Colonel Holborne paced the apartment in evident agitation. "What am I to think?" he said; "what am I to think? Your father, your stepmother, your sister, all bade me hope for your affection. What am I to think?"

"Do not speak of others," I replied; "think only such thoughts as your own candid mind would suggest to you, and let the honourable feelings which animate your own bosom teach you to place some reliance in mine, and to believe that, as far as I am concerned in this unhappy affair—though I have acted weakly and irresolutely—I have, at least, never wilfully misled you."

"I will believe it," he replied; "I will believe you are incapable of falsehood—to think other would be too painful. There is consolation in confiding in your truth, Elizabeth; I will not lose it. And, oh, that face, now pale with alarm, and bathed in tears for the safety of a rival in your affec-

tions—those affections I have been taught to believe would one day be my own; that face does not look capable of deception, nor of wilfully wounding the heart that at this moment would prefer death to the loss of its dearest hope."

"Believe me, Colonel Holborne," I said, "could I avoid it, I would never give you a moment's pain."

"I believe you would not," he replied, and sighed deeply. Again he took a turn or two across the room. "Mine is a painful, most painful position. Elizabeth, I will not deceive you; it is not without its temptations. I am called on to give up my rival—the only man who stands in the way of my dearest hope—to the Earl of Stamford. Without the violation of any principle of right—indeed, by the very fulfilment of my duty—I could at once sweep this envied rival from my path; and not even your sense of justice could condemn me, for you could not blame a man who was true to the cause to which he is sworn. But, instead of this, you call on me to incur all hazards to my own safety—you call on me to save him!"

"It is worthy the spirit of Colonel Holborne," I replied. "To achieve a victory over his own heart is one, I grant, of difficulty, but not one above his magnanimity. You will not give up Edmund to death?"

"Certainly not, if I can save him."

"But you spoke but now, though doubtfully, about some effort, some plan you had to propose to save ——"

"I no longer doubt on that point," he said. "Your confession of preference for my rival compels me, as a man having in me any generosity of feeling, for your sake to try to save him; the effort shall be made, but you must assist in it." There was a raised, a noble, almost an enthusiastic expression in the countenance of the Colonel as he thus spoke; but generosity, indeed, was so inherent in him, that it inspired every look and word.

"May God bless you!" I exclaimed. "I will do all you may command me, for your soul is the soul of honour, and I am convinced would require nothing from me but what was right."

"You may possibly think otherwise when you hear what it is. But I have no other means within my power, no alternative; this attempt, or certain death for the two beings most beloved by you on earth. Hear my plan. The Earl of

Stamford has heard from me that my affections are deeply engaged to the daughter of a Royalist gentleman that I one day hope to make my wife. He does not, however, yet know the lady is the child of Sir Arther Mooren. What I have now to propose is, that I should forthwith write and acquaint him with this truth; adding that, if he insists on my giving up Sir Arthur and Captain Edmund Oxenham, I must lose all hope of you for ever, for that you will, in such a case, consider me as the principal instrument of your father's fate. I propose then to remind him that, when I had the good fortune to bring up my regiment to his rescue and to save his life, at the head of his troop he returned thanks to me for what I had done to save him and his people from certain destruction, and promised, before God and those brave men, that if hereafter, on any emergency, I had aught to ask of him that might serve myself, he would, if it lay in his power, grant it, let the peril of it be what it might to him. I will then tell Stamford that the hour is now come when, from force of circumstances, I am compelled to remind him of this, and that to spare these Royalist gentlemen, who are my prisoners, and to place the fate of Sir Arthur Mooren and Captain Edmund Oxenham in my hands, is the service I must implore him to do for me in acquittal of that solemn promise. So much for *my* part in this affair; *yours*, I fear, will cost you a more painful effort."

Colonel Holborne paused; he seemed much moved, and it was not without an effort he thus resumed:—"The Earl of Stamford, I believe, esteems me; but the circumstances of the times, and his having been on two or three occasions grievously deceived in doing acts of mercy, have made him somewhat suspicious; and when he finds that it is for the father and friend of the woman I love that I now plead to him, I fear he may be more than usually alive to his suspicious fears. He may suspect some exaggerated view of the circumstances on my part, in order to cover the offences of two persons so obnoxious to the Parliament as the discovery of the late plot must render them. A letter from you, therefore, is absolutely necessary to satisfy his doubts."

"How can I address the Earl of Stamford?" I said; "what can I say to him?"

"When you shall have heard all," replied the Colonel, "you will yourself admit that, unless you would run the risk

of bringing ruin on me, who interpose to save your father and Edmund Oxenham, you must write. Did I refuse my prisoners, without giving the Earl of Stamford the strongest and most convincing proofs that all my hopes of happiness in relation to yourself depend on their safety, the Committeemen of the West, who are already jealous of my influence with their masters, would not be slow to make the Earl believe that I was desirous to save them from some motive of private interest. It becomes me, as a man of honour, not to suffer the possibility of a suspicion such as this to be raised against my character. I must, therefore, entreat you to write to the Earl, and to let your letter accompany mine."

"There needs no other reason than the last you have assigned, Colonel Holborne," I said, "to induce me at once to give my consent to write. Tell me, what must I say to the Earl? I am bound in gratitude, as well as inclination, to endeavour to requite your generosity, poor as are my means to show myself grateful, by the most ready fulfilment of your wishes. Say on, then. I will write as you dictate."

I turned to my escritoire and prepared to do so.

"Write," he proceeded, "that you feel sensible the Earl of Stamford, as a brave man, though an enemy to your father's cause, will receive with generous concern a daughter's supplication to save the life of a father, and of a young gentleman who is that father's dearest friend, and has been for many years esteemed by herself as a brother. You can have no objection to say this?"

"None," I answered; "it is the truth." And I wrote as he had dictated.

"Add," continued Colonel Holborne, "that you are betrothed ——" I paused, held the pen over the paper, but did not write.

"Nay," said Colonel Holborne, "you must say it; there is no choice; and, by your father's will, you know it is truth. If that engagement be ever fulfilled hereafter is another thing. It concerns not the Earl of Stamford; I would I could add, it concerns not me. But you must write it. It is the only ground on which I can prefer my application. I will spare you (though they would be powerful pleas in behalf of those you would save)—yet I will spare your sincerity and your delicacy the pain of all strong professions in my favour. Yet you must add, for it is absolutely necessary, that you

have told me, unless the lives of your father and Captain Oxenham are spared, at my request, you will never be mine."

"I cannot write this," I said; "indeed, I cannot."

My father, I well knew, would not have been displeased, had I given such an assurance. But Edmund—his mind harassed by the long anxieties of a passion, which even yet he hoped (though I could not hope it) my father might one day be brought to approve—harassed by the tortures of doubt and jealousy, what would be his sufferings should he chance to learn that I had written such a letter to the Earl of Stamford! I felt convinced that he would rather his life should be risked, by his person being surrendered to his enemies, than owe his preservation to such a declaration on my part, in favour of his rival; and so I told the Colonel.

"Then, there is no other way left for safety," said he. "My letter, without yours, I fear, will not avail. If you refuse, not only will the man who is thus jealous—unreasonably so, at such a moment—lose his life, but your father will, in all probability, perish. Can you so sacrifice him?"

"No!" I exclaimed; "no, I will not! Come what may, I will do my duty to my father. But at what a price!"

I took up the pen, and wrote hastily what I had been desired to write: the effort was hurried, because I would not trust myself to think what I was doing. I would not suffer my mind to place before me, in all its terrible consequences, the thing in which I was about to witness against myself, and with my own hand! After having written the letter, I gave it to Colonel Holborne.

"This will not do," said he: "your hand is so tremulous, that the writing in some parts is almost illegible. You must write it over again. I will leave you. Compose yourself. Make a fair transcript, and then send it to me by your waiting damsel; she will find me in my chamber. I am now going thither, to write my own letter to the Earl of Stamford: yours must bear it company."

I said I would do all that he desired; and I arose from my seat to bid him farewell, and once more to thank him for all he was about to do to save my father and his friend. In doing so, I could not hide my agitation; my sorrows would speak; the tears stole down my cheeks: he saw and pitied my distress; and, throwing himself at my feet, as he pressed

my hand to his lips, said, "Do not, let me implore you, do not thus distress yourself at what you are about to write. Set your heart at rest on that account. Elizabeth, I will not say that I can ever be indifferent to you; weak would be my affection for you could I thus resign all its fond and long cherished hopes. You know how much I was favoured by your father, long ere these troubles began, and how greatly he disapproves the pretensions of Edmund. Never, till this day, did I know how deep was the interest he possessed in your heart. Had I known it sooner—but it is now too late to look back—had I known it sooner—Yet, believe me, though I cannot promise to resign all my hopes of you for ever—for who shall say what time and circumstance may bring forth?—yet, I promise you, on the word of a gentleman, that no personal consideration, not even the affections of my own heart, shall ever tempt me to make an ungenerous use of the letter you are now about to despatch to the Earl of Stamford; and that never hereafter will I receive your hand, though I should prize the gift as the greatest of all earthly blessings—never will I receive it unless it is given me by yourself. Can this assurance satisfy you? Is your mind now at ease?"

I assured Colonel Holborne it was, on that ground; and again and again did I thank him for the generous manner in which he had acted towards me and mine.

"And now," he added, "I must, in return for my promise, claim one from you—it is, that what has this day passed between us, and the means I have adopted to save the lives of these two persons so dear to you, shall rest a secret in your bosom. Believe me, I have the strongest reason for making the request. To Edmund, above all, you must observe the strictest secresy: he must never know by what steps I have saved him. Will you give me this promise?"

"Most freely," I replied; "and I thank you for requiring it of me; as, by so doing, you have relieved me from much embarrassment. Farewell, Colonel Holborne, you need not fear me: even could I forget the sacred nature of a promise, my own fears would make me silent. Farewell."

At the very moment the Colonel was about to leave me, whilst I was drying my eyes with my handkerchief in one hand, as he held the other within his, the letter just written open before us, and each with the evident marks of

the agitating scene that had so recently passed strong upon us, the door suddenly opened, and in came Dorothea. She looked astonished, we confused, not knowing what to say in explanation or excuse of what must appear to her so extraordinary. Dorothea saw our confusion; but, instead of giving us time to recover, or to help us out of our difficulty, she added to it by saying, on no account would she have intruded had she known we were closeted in secret conference, begged pardon, retired instantly, and shut the door.

"Ill-natured woman," said the Colonel: "she will so handle this circumstance as to wind the weak, the passionate, and jealous Edmund, pardon me that I speak thus of him, but indeed he does not deserve your affection, to wind him to her purpose, and to gratify her own malignant feelings, by inciting him against you. I will endeavour to disappoint her, however; for I will myself tell Edmund that I have been with you, to inform you I entertain hopes the Earl of Stamford may be induced to act with clemency towards your father; though I shall not tell him by what means."

"How generous you are, Colonel Holborne," I said, "on all occasions where true generosity of heart is called forth! But I fear Dorothea will sow the seeds of mischief before you can prevent it; for see—she is at this moment crossing the lawn, yonder, to join Edmund in the Paradise garden."

"Well, then, there he must listen to her tales, if he is weak enough to give ear to them," said the Colonel; "for I must no longer delay my letter to the Earl of Stamford. Send me yours the moment it is finished."

I promised I would do so, and he left me.

I then proceeded to write; and, after having fulfilled my task, I addressed the letter to the Earl; but I did not seal it, as Colonel Holborne had desired me not to do so, because he wished to inclose it open in his own, as he designed telling the Earl he knew the contents. I then wrote on the rough draft: "A copy of my letter to the most noble the Earl of Stamford," with the date of the same. This I locked up in my escritoire. I next inclosed the letter that was to be forwarded in a fair cover, and wrote upon it, "*For Colonel Holborne, these.*" I then called my maid, thinking she was at hand, in order to send it by her, as agreed. But she was not in the way; and my sister's maid, seeing me with a letter in my hand, asked me if there was anything she could do for

me, as my own servant had been called to my step-mother.

Not choosing to send for her when engaged with Lady Mooren, I was obliged (though vexed by this trifling circumstance) to beg my sister's maid to give the letter I had in my to Colonel Holborne, whom she would find in his own chamber. I then returned to mine, and shut the door.

In about an hour after I saw from my window Colonel Holborne in conference with his messenger. They crossed the lawn, to go round to the front of the house. I had no doubt the man was about to depart on his secret mission to the Earl of Stamford. I then went to an apartment that overlooked the inner court, impelled to do so by an undefined spirit of curiosity, mingled with dread. I saw a horse brought round to the hall-door. The messenger, armed and accoutred for a journey, came forth; he mounted, and then Colonel Holborne delivered to him a packet, which he deposited carefully in his bosom. In another moment the man waved his hand, struck the spurs into his horse's sides, and, as I heard the tramp of his feet over the pavement of the court, I felt my heart sink within me, as if I had despatched with the messenger who bore my letter the missive of my own ruin, to which I had set my hand and seal.

In a short time all was changed: my father and Edmund were assured of their lives, of safety, and Colonel Holborne was once more in quarters at Moortown, but for a few days only, till he could receive from Sir Arthur Mooren a surrender of all arms, ammunition, &c., and place a certain number of his own followers in our house, who were to keep it nominally for the Parliament.

My father was now perfectly free, for it had been arranged, by the influence of the Colonel, that two Parliamentarians of rank in the army and prisoners to Prince Rupert were to be restored to their party by way of exchange for the liberty granted to Sir Arthur Mooren and his friend. But, though thus free, he had not decided how he should act at this crisis; and Edmund had been so candid as to tell Colonel Holborne that, as the Earl of Stamford had been contented with exchange, and had not required of him any promise not to serve again in the Royal cause, he should certainly do so, if he saw occasion, by any new outbreak in the West.

CHAPTER XIII.

The bard has sung, God never formed a soul,
Without its own peculiar mate, to meet
Its wandering half, when ripe, to crown the whole
Bright plan of bliss, most heavenly, most complete.

But thousand evil things there are that hate
To look on happiness; these hurt, impede;
And, leagued with time, space, circumstance, and fate,
Keep kindred heart from heart, to pine, and pant, and bleed.

MRS. BROOKE'S *Zophiel.*

SHORTLY after these occurrences, a friend of ours, Mistress Margaret Pengelly (of Sortridge House, situated not far from Moortown), being very sick and confined to her chamber, so earnestly entreated me to come to her, that I complied with her request, notwithstanding that the disturbances in the town of Tavistock, hard by, then made it dangerous to cross the country even for the short distance between the two houses. I was detained by the sickness of my friend for nearly a fortnight. On my return home, I found Colonel Holborne still at our house; but I was convinced, by the gravity of his aspect, as he saluted me, that something unpleasant had happened during my absence.

I was not long left in doubt, as my stepsister, who always took a lively pleasure in telling me anything she knew would grieve or mortify me, seized on the first moment we were alone together to inform me that things were in a very painful and singular position between Colonel Holborne and Edmund Oxenham. That, soon after my departure, the latter had evinced a very ill feeling towards the Colonel, and on more occasions than one had treated him with a haughtiness of manner that amounted almost to insult. That the Colonel had shown great forbearance towards his irritable rival, and, it was evident, had purposely shunned him as much as possible, from no feeling of unkindness but in order to avoid occasion of quarrel.

My distress on hearing this was great, as I had not the slightest doubt that some new jealousy on the part of Edmund respecting myself was the cause; and that, unless I treated Colonel Holborne with a coldness and distance which, under present circumstances, would amount to ingratitude, he would not feel satisfied. This I could never do. To Colonel Hol-

borne I was indebted for the life of my father—for the life of the very man who was (as the Colonel well knew) his favoured rival, and who now requited his generosity with jealousy, insult, and suspicion. True it was, that Edmund did not know, to the full extent, the generous part the Colonel had taken for his and Sir Arthur's preservation; and I was bound by a promise the most solemn to keep it secret. I could read but too plainly, by Edmund's looks, that he was on the watch for an opportunity to speak to me alone; possibly to demand some explanations. I endeavoured to avoid the encounter, as I could tell him nothing to satisfy his jealous doubts, or to account for my more than ordinarily kind and grateful demeanour towards the Colonel.

All I could hope was that Edmund, at last, might be wrought upon to place some confidence in me, without calling on me to explain every circumstance which he chose to imagine was an injury or an offence to himself. With this view, I resolved to trust to his generosity—his native candour; and accident one day affording me an opportunity, I endeavoured to act on the resolution I had formed. But, alas! how little did I foresee to what my attempt would lead!—too little did I consider that prejudice, when allied to love, is of all enemies the most difficult to subdue—the most determined neither to listen to reason, nor to see clearly the simplest truth. It is like a mist, which, whilst we are enveloped in it, obscures alike the nearest valley or the most distant mountain; everything loses its just proportion; and the most insignificant objects become magnified and rise into importance, by being viewed through so deceptive a veil.

So was it now. Edmund received all my attempts to convince him that his late conduct was unreasonable, with angry impatience. I appealed to him as a man, and asked him if, as a victor, Colonel Holborne had not treated him, and all of us, with the utmost generosity, after the surrender of our arms and mansion. I bade him look around, and consider in how different a manner other Royalist families had been used after their capture by a Cromwell or an Ireton. To the truth of these remarks he could not but assent, yet I perceived there was still something that hung upon his mind—he was not satisfied. Some deep and hidden cause of apprehension seemed to make him mistrust all I said.

I saw this. I felt deeply hurt, and charged him with injustice, saying, "If you will not be plain with me, I will set you an example of candour, and tell you what I think of your conduct towards ——"

"I wish you would," he said, bitterly; "I wish you would be candid with me. You should find me not slow to answer it."

"In what do I want candour?" I replied. "Have I not always confided in you? Who has been the person to indulge suspicion, you or myself? Edmund, I cannot but tell you that you have led me into a neglect of duty—into secrecy and difficulty, and have not treated me generously whilst labouring under their effects."

I said this, I believe, with passion. I confess it was unwise. His mind was already irritated by the working of his own thoughts that had for weeks been preying on him unspoken. To soothe, and not to reproach, would have been the best, the safest course, at this moment. But my pride was touched and wounded by his want of confidence in me. I fancied he had shown no consideration for my feelings, or for the difficulties of my situation, and I was determined he should not see, by the pain he now gave me, not only how little I had deserved such treatment but how dear he still was to my heart.

On hearing my last reproach, Edmund reddened. "What!" he exclaimed; "accuse me of indulging suspicion, and tell me I have no cause for it! Talk of my want of confidence, and—but tell me one thing—only one thing—and I will be satisfied. I will put your confidence in me to the proof. Tell me, is there no secret—nothing of which I am kept in ignorance—between yourself and this very generous Colonel Holborne?"

The tone of anger, of irony, in which the last words were spoken, was to me most irritating. It was now my turn to take offence, and I said with spirit, "Suppose there should be, what cause have you to feel injured by it? Are you so favoured by my father that, of necessity, nothing must pass between my father's friend and myself, but it must concern you to know it? Rest satisfied with my assurances and with my actions, and, believe me, they merit the confidence I require till I prove myself unworthy. But do not arraign me on your surmises; for on such alone I will not be questioned. Rest satisfied."

"This is not the way to make me so," said Edmund, bitterly; yet, as if a sudden revulsion of feeling had at once overcome him—as if my words had too deeply wounded him to let pride be any longer his support, he exclaimed, as he turned pale, and the tears started into his eyes, "O, Elizabeth! how can you thus wound me? Have I not confided in you? Can you—who are dearer to me than life—without whom life has no charm—can you, who like myself, from the very days of infancy, have known little else than sorrow and misfortune—can you thus reproach me! I thought your love was given to me as a blessing of Providence to console me for every care. But what has it proved! a source of suffering so great that, forgive me, if I say it, the few moments of joy I have known for many past months have been counterbalanced by such days of anguish, by a prospect so hopeless, that well, perhaps, had it been for both had we never met."

"Yet I scarcely expected to hear as much from you," I replied—"from you, after all I have done and suffered for you—after having offended even my own father for your sake."

"Believe me," he said, "I never meant to regret our meeting. You mistake me. I regret only, when we have had so many evils to encounter, which we could not avoid, that we should have raised any between ourselves, or should suffer them to exist, when a few words of confidence would remove all that is painful. You reproach me with your want of obedience to a father. I never wished to gain you without the sanction of Sir Arthur Mooren. But you know well that fortune and these wretched times have yet been my enemy, and that I waited but for a brighter prospect to seek you, as you deserve to be sought, in the way of duty and of honour. That time may yet come, if there is but constancy on your part and patience on mine. But if, in the interval, I see you giving a willing ear to the address of another, and that other, in ignorance of the true state of your feelings, is favoured by your father, who may hereafter persuade you to confirm his choice, what am I to think? What have I not to fear? You may change; I fear that, in some degree, you have changed."

"Indeed, you have no cause to think so," I replied.

"Why, then, continue to countenance, as you do, Colonel

Holborne? His affection for you is evident—most evident; he could not conceal it if he would. His looks, his words, his every action, speak a love at once fixed and devoted to you. Elizabeth, you never check it. If he asks you to walk with him, you give him, with a smile, a willing hand. Do you think I do not observe these things? And in those thousand gentle and kind words and attentions which woman alone, and a woman of delicate feeling, knows how to bestow, you do all you can to convince the Colonel how much you study to gratify him—how desirous you are to please him. Does not this look like change?—and this from you!"

"All is true, Edmund," I replied; "and yet I am not changed."

"Then your conduct is no less weak than unjust," said he. "Do you think Colonel Holborne does not feel all this? Do you think he does not build on it hopes and expectations for the future? He would be more than man did he do other. In common honesty, you ought not to treat him with such distinction, if you intend to disappoint and deceive him at the last."

"I do not intend to disappoint or to deceive Colonel Holborne at the last, Edmund," I replied; "I do neither now. Believe me or not, as you may, yet I tell you once again, Colonel Holborne is not deceived. He perfectly understands me, and we understand each other."

"I have no doubt you do," said Edmund, again relapsing into jealousy, and speaking in a tone of the utmost bitterness; and thus did pride and mistrust with the one,—irresolution and rashness with the other, occasion a deepening of the angry feelings with which we had commenced this unhappy meeting.

Not to dwell on circumstances that it would be painful for me to repeat, and tedious for you to read, let me say, all my entreaty that Edmund would confide in me proved unavailing. At length, he dwelt so much on the fear of my changing in favour of his rival, that he drew from me a promise, which I gave more with a view to calm his mind and soothe his distress than from any other motive, that, if my affections did change, I would candidly acquaint him with the truth. But, no sooner had I given this promise, than (ever alive to self-torment, where his feelings for me were in

question) he fancied the very readiness with which I had given it, in order to satisfy him, was an admission I might change; and that it would be followed by my bestowing both hand and heart on the Colonel, as soon as the circumstances of the times would admit. This apprehension distracted him; and before I could calm his fears our distressing conference, thus continued without satisfaction to either, was suddenly ended by my being summoned to attend on Lady Mooren.

Before I quitted him Edmund told me that he was about to leave Moortown for some days to attend his uncle, now very old and infirm, whom, in consequence of the late disturbances, he had not seen for many weeks. One of our servants was to ride forth with him. I begged him to write to me on his arrival at his uncle's, but the man returned and brought me no letter.

CHAPTER XIV.

Our passions always fatal counsels give;
Through a fallacious glass our wrongs appear
Still greater than they are.

HIGGAN.

Let's not unnerve each other—part at once!
All farewells should be sudden, when for ever.

BYRON.

ONE evening, not more than two or three days after Edmund's departure, when I had retired to my closet, there to indulge my own thoughts unobserved, my maid came to me in great trepidation, and said abruptly, "O, madam! let me beg of you to go to the window of the gallery that looks out on the garden. Mr. Edmund Oxenham is waiting below it to speak to you. He is in the garden; and in such a state that I fear he will go distracted unless he sees you. Poor young gentleman! it grieved my heart to see him, when he begged me to tell you, and entreat you to speak to him. He waits there. Madam, I say nothing, for I love you; but I see much."

I ran instantly to the little gallery she had named. It overhung the Paradise garden.* It was situated in a part of the house near my own chamber, not at all frequented by any of the family except myself and my servant. I opened softly the window, and, by the light of the moon, which had risen above the tops of the neighbouring woods, perceived Edmund leaning on the back of a seat that stood on the turf beneath. I could not see distinctly by the feeble light which gleamed around. It might, therefore, be only fancy, but I thought there was something very pale and ghastly in his countenance, as he looked up at me on my coming to the window.

"Edmund!" I exclaimed, "for God's sake, what is the matter? Where have you been? How did you return? What does all this mean?"

"That I am wretched—most wretched; beyond all power of expressing my wretchedness. Oh, Elizabeth! Elizabeth, what have you not said?—what do I not fear? My brain seems on fire when I think of it." He pressed his hand to his head. "I should think death a release to what I feel."

"For heaven's sake," I said, "do not talk thus! What is it you require? What can I do to calm this distress?"

"Are you not changed?" he said. "Oh! tell me, tell me; are you not changed?—are not your affections Colonel Holborne's? And is it not from motives of pity and fear for me that you do not tell me so at once? But I want no pity. I will accept none from you. Tell me, Elizabeth—tell me the worst; are you not changed?"

"No, indeed," I said; "why these suspicions? You know what I feel, yet you little heed my feelings. Why did you not write to me to satisfy me of your welfare by the servant who returned on Saturday?"

"I write!" he exclaimed; "how could I write? What could I write? Nothing to satisfy myself; nothing coherent, I believe. Yet I commenced a letter. But such was the agony of my mind, I could not remain where I was. I determined, therefore, at all hazards, to return and endeavour to see you."

"Have you what you wrote to me about you?" I inquired.

* A Paradise garden and a Paradise chamber were found in almost every old house of the date of this tale.

"I have," he replied; "here it is." He took from his bosom a paper, and, standing on the garden-seat, reached forth his arm, so that I could take it from him. At that moment I heard a step.

"I must leave you," I said, "indeed, I must, for I hear some one stir in the gallery."

"Do not go," he said, "till you promise me one thing. You will not refuse it me, unless you would drive me to distraction."

"What would you have me do?" I replied: "Speak quickly, or we may be discovered. Surely that is the voice of Dorothea; I hear her in the hall, she is coming to the gallery."

"Meet me to-morrow evening in the Pleasance," he answered, "at eight o'clock meet me. The family will then be engaged. Till then I will keep close at a friend's house hard by; so that none here will know that I am returned, or will suspect our meeting. Oh, Elizabeth! do not refuse this. Life or death depends upon it. You will come?"

"I will," I said, "at eight in the evening."

"Ay, at eight," he replied. "Farewell! God bless you!"

On my return to my chamber I hastily opened the unfinished letter which Edmund had given me.

THE LETTER.

"My dearest Love,—

"For thus, as long as I live, must I call you, for are you not the dearest, the only Love my heart can ever know?—you have desired me to write to you. Willingly do I obey you; though, I fear, in doing so, I can convey no pleasure to you, for a cheerful mind is to me a greater stranger than ever. Were I sufficiently at ease to choose a subject now, I would recall that which I thought would most powerfully bring to your remembrance the happy hours we have passed together; those hours during which, in your dear presence, I have received from you the tenderest marks of affection. If possible, I would fly from myself; from my own thoughts, that incessantly torment me. Everything I see around me reminds me of what I was once, of what I have since been, and of what I am now. I can find no rest. Sleep gives me none, for you haunt me in my dreams; and present the most dreadful images to my mind. I awake feverish and unre-

freshed. I scarcely remember or can believe what you have said, but fear something to come. My ring tells me—that ring which was your gift—you ought never to forget me. The first three words I have written tell me you cannot—yet you are free if it is your wish. I scarcely know what I write. I know you will forgive me if I do you injustice. And indeed I am more an object of pity than of anger. You would think so if you felt, but for a moment, the pains that I endure. But, perhaps, I needlessly torment myself. You bade me write. What but my distracted thoughts could you expect me to write now? Could you imagine I could write with composure after our last conversation? Yet I am aware I may be doing you great injustice. But what a wide field for a half-frantic imagination has your lips opened! Our miseries too frequently arise from our happiness. I can know nothing, but must remain the victim of a thousand doubts till I can see you. One thing I do know; and have learnt it since I saw you last; I know the strength of the chains that bind me to this world, and, by what life is to an existence so miserable as mine, how welcome would be its close! But I will see you—yes, see you—and then I may be made to forget that dreadful word—*change!* How can I bear to write it in reference to yourself? How could it ever pass your lips?—*Change*, it cannot be! But I will see you and know the truth from yourself. You alone shall pronounce the fate of the unhappy

EDMUND."

The perusal of a letter so distracted as this filled me with fear, with terror; I resolved that on the morrow evening I would do all I could to calm the anxious spirit. But ere the time arrived for our meeting, by some means or other, my sister Dorothea found out that Edmund was returned, and had kept himself private in the neighbourhood, without coming to our house. This intelligence somewhat offended my father, because, during his visit to his uncle, Edmund had undertaken to be the bearer of some papers of import to a Royalist of note, who lived near his kinsman, and Sir Arthur was anxiously awaiting an answer.

As the hour drew near in which I had consented to meet Edmund in the Pleasance, when I recollected the miserable state of mind in which he had last parted from me, you may

judge what were my feelings. But Dorothea, who failed not to be suspicious, watched me so closely, and induced her mother to do the same, that I found it impossible to keep my appointment; I could neither go to him to soothe his wounded feelings, nor make him acquainted with the cause of my absence. In the interval, impatient at my not coming to fulfil my appointment, lost to all self-control, that very night Edmund himself suddenly appeared among us. He looked wildly around as he came into the room; and though he apologised to Sir Arthur for not having fully executed the mission he had promised to undertake, yet he neither explained wherefore he had failed in doing so nor what was the cause of his thus suddenly and strangely coming among us at so unusual an hour.

Dorothea, who had been absent for a short time, now returned into the room; and I fancied there was a triumphant expression in her countenance, as she glanced her eye first on Edmund and then on me. Edmund hardly spoke—hardly looked at me; and at the very moment I was about addressing to him a few kind words of explanation, he suddenly arose, complained of indisposition, and, telling my father that he would not fail on the morrow executing his commission, bowed to us, and retired. I was somewhat surprised by observing that Dorothea arose likewise at the same instant, and contrived some frivolous excuse for leaving the room immediately after. I was seated not very far from the door, which, in her hasty retreat, Dorothea had not firmly closed. I rose up to shut it, and in doing so, I caught a sight of her leaning over the rail of the corridor that looked into the hall, and heard her say distinctly, as if she would recall Edmund, "Stay, Mr. Oxenham; a moment stay, a word with you."

I was so distressed, fearing, yet not knowing what to fear, that I took the first opportunity of retiring early to my closet for the rest of the evening. My closet, or study, opened on the gallery so often named. I was frequently in the habit of reading or writing there till a late hour, the family in general going to rest before myself. I ought to mention that the room was in the oldest and most neglected part of the house; it was small, gloomy, and ill-furnished—hence had it been deemed good enough for me. Fortunately, it stood remote from the more elegant and commodious

apartments of Lady Mooren and her daughter. This solitariness was to me a source of great comfort, as, without some especial motive for the intrusion, neither my stepmother nor Dorothea ever sought me in my retreat, which to me was also my refuge.

In happier times, Edmund had often found his way unobserved to my closet; but, since his late angry and jealous moods, he had rather shunned than sought it. On the evening of which I am now speaking, as I sat pensively musing on my unhappy lot, o thought I heard steps in the gallery, and listened: judge of my astonishment—my door was suddenly opened; I looked up, and never shall I forget the thrilling sense of surprise and emotion with which I beheld Edmund stand before me, accoutred for riding; his cloak thrown carlessly over his shoulders, his bonnet on his head, and an expression of horror and distraction in every line of his countenance! He was white as death; and so great the grief that swelled within his bosom he could scarcely speak. He struggled for utterance, and at length found it. "O, Elizabeth!" he said, "I am come to take my leave of you for ever—yes, for ever! We must part; though my breaking heart will hardly let me speak it, we must part for ever!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "what is this? what has happened?"

"O, do not, do not ask me," he said; "I cannot answer you—I am not at liberty to answer you! Elizabeth! I have my secrets as well as you have yours; but mine are most unwilling ones—not so yours!"

Again I implored him to tell me the cause of all this—of so much distraction in his words and looks.

"Ask me nothing; seek to know nothing," he replied; "would I had been as wise! Elizabeth, do you know what I am come for? I am come to bless you; yes, to bless you! You have broken my heart, but still will I bless you! Fear nothing from me; I have no resentments that shall injure you! No! false, cruel, unkind as you have been to me, I would not injure you! I will neither disturb your peace nor thwart your happiness; yet——"

"O, Edmund!" I said, "what words are these you have spoken? What does all this mean? You talk to me of falsehood, of cruelty—what have I done that you should thus

wound my feelings? What new cause of jealousy is this? Would you make me wretched? Would you be my ruin?"

"You have ruined me," he replied, in a tone that indicated a sense of high and indignant emotion. "Elizabeth! do not attempt again to deceive me; do not! I believe you feel for me—I can believe that! And O! what a heart would be yours did you not feel for the wreck you have made of mine! My peace, my hopes, are for ever blasted!"

"I have never injured you wilfully," I said. "Would you but hear me, all might yet be well. But I see how it is; Dorothea is my enemy, and she has worked on your mind to keep alive this most unreasonable jealousy."

"You are mistaken," he replied; "Dorothea, it is true, is not your friend, but no enemy could injure you with me had not you yourself confirmed my just suspicions."

"To convince you, I see, is vain," I said, "for you will not be convinced! Yet, God knows my heart, and how deeply I pity a distress which you will not suffer me to alleviate!"

"I do not want your pity," he replied, proudly; "I want only to tell you that I am no longer either the dupe of my own feelings or of your ill-judged compassion, and that, cost me what it may, I can and will leave you. I will no longer be a barrier to your hopes. Be happy; think no more of the wretch you have made in me! Farewell—may God bless you!"

I caught him by the cloak and, ere he tore it from my hand, implored him not to leave me in this distracted manner, and with circumstances so unexplained between us. But this only seemed to irritate him the more; and he told me that, in refusing a full explanation, he did but follow my example—that I had preferred another to him, inasmuch as I had refused to give Colonel Holborne up as the sacrifice to his peace.

This conduct, I confess, somewhat roused my feelings of pride; and I could not but think in these repeated quarrels I was ill used by his want of confidence in my integrity of purpose. I doubted not, also, that the angry fit would pass away, as it had often done before, and that a short time would again bring him to me as a penitent. That night, however, after once more solemnly blessing me, and at the very moment of returning tenderness, as if he feared its influence on himself, he rushed from me, descended the stairs

at the end of the gallery like the flight of an arrow, passed out, mounted his horse that stood in readiness, and rode with frantic violence from the house.

CHAPTER XV.

Have not all past human beings parted ?
And must not all the present one day part ?
BYRON.

FOR many weeks we heard nothing of Edmund. My father expressed himself much surprised at his continued absence, and at length took measures to gain some intelligence of a young man in whose welfare, notwithstanding the offence he had committed in regard to myself, he felt a deep interest. After a while, by means of an agent of Colonel Holborne, we learnt the following particulars.

On leaving Moortown, Edmund had gone direct to Bristol, and there had joined the forces of Prince Rupert. The siege of that place by the Parliamentary army had commenced a few days after. Edmund conducted himself in the most gallant manner during the vigorous resistance made by the Royalists. Till the last he stood by the side of Sir Nicholas Slanning, a Devonshire gentlemen who was killed in the siege. He had fought, not merely bravely, but desperately, as if he courted rather than shunned death. He had not, however, fallen in the action; and on Prince Rupert surrendering the city (so much against the wishes of the Royalists), not choosing to become a prisoner to the Parliament, Edmund, with a few other spirited young men like himself, fled, and, taking advantage of an opportunity that presented itself, made their way to join a vessel then about to sail for America, proposing for ever to bid adieu to their native land.

A few days after these occurrences became known to us, Colonel Holborne asked to be allowed to see me. He came, and for some minutes we both remained silent; my tears alone spoke my feelings. He seemed deeply affected. After a pause he took my hand, and thus addressed me with a candour and consideration for my sufferings, that, if possible, added to my esteem for his worth.

"Madam," he said, "I am this day about to take my leave of you. In a short time my duty would have called me from Moortown. But my now going, I confess, is on your account, or rather on my own; to spare my own feelings am I about to depart so abruptly. I would not say as much in the presence of your father for fear I should excite his displeasure towards you. But you know my resolution—that I would never avail myself of any promise, nor of what you have written in my favour, against your will. It is true Edmund has for ever bidden you adieu, and, though I should still consider the most distant hope of gaining your hand as the greatest of earthly blessings, yet I here most solemnly repeat that assurance which I gave in the moments of your distress, that, without your own consent, I will never press you to bestow it on me."

"You are generous, Colonel Holborne," I said, "most generous."

"Indeed I am not, madam," he replied; "I do but serve myself in acting thus, for without your esteem I could not support life, and you would not esteem a man who, to secure his own wishes, destroyed your peace. No, if I am so unfortunate as never to gain your affection let me at least deserve your esteem, and in that I shall endeavour to be happy. For your sake I will endeavour to be so, that you may be spared all regrets for having destroyed the peace of one who loves you but too well. Elizabeth, you have neither importunity nor reproaches to fear from me. I am the creature of your will; my first object is your happiness; tell me only how I can act so as best to secure that, and you shall find I can forget myself in you."

I was struck to the heart by this generous conduct of Colonel Holborne; so opposite, alas! to the fiery and frantic demeanour of Edmund, yet with a feeling not less sincere in all that related to the affections. There was ardent passion in the hearts of both; but, coloured and governed by the character of the individual, how differently did it influence the conduct of each! Pained as I was to confess it, even to my own thoughts, yet I could not but acknowledge that in Edmund it was selfish and exacting, in Colonel Holborne self-sacrificing and generous. But, though my reason taught me thus to judge between them, my heart was still rebellious against my better sense; and I still loved

and regretted the man who had destroyed my peace, and had abandoned me in jealous passion. But, whatever were my thoughts, I could not have the cruelty to make the Colonel acquainted with them anew at this moment. His humility and mistrust of himself taught him ever to be content with any the least mark of favour he received from me, and to think it more than his desert. He thanked me fervently for the assurance I now gave him of my esteem, and, when I talked of gratitude, declared that all the debt which deserved that name was on his side.

He then prepared to take leave of me, asking me only for one promise, which, under existing circumstances, I felt it was impossible to deny him. The promise was this: That if, at any future period, either a change of circumstances or of feeling should induce me to believe, without injuring my own happiness, I could ratify the contract my father had made for me with the gift of my hand, I would frankly let him know it; for, as he was resolved never to be the means of my being importuned by my family to accept him, he should be compelled never to renew his claims upon me unless I previously intimated that such a renewal on his part would no longer give me pain. With this understanding we parted.

I pass in silence my repeated struggles to obtain outward composure, and, if possible, inward peace.

And, though I could not but feel I had been unreasonably and indeed cruelly treated by Edmund, yet, knowing as I did that his love for me was the original cause of all his faults and failings, and that it had much embittered his naturally irritable and defective temper, I could not help remembering him with an interest much too powerful for my own repose. But I felt it was my duty to forget one who had so evidently discarded me, and I hoped that the pride of woman—the injured feelings of doubted and misprised affection—would do the rest, and complete, though tardily, my cure. But this I put off, even in thought, to a very distant day, not dreaming what was at hand, and that a new and severe trial was still in store for me.

CHAPTER XVI.

Wedded love is founded on esteem,
Which the fair merits of the mind engage,
For those are charms that never can decay;
But Time, which gives new whiteness to the swan,
Improves their lustre.

FENTON.

Absence, with all its pains,
Is by this charming moment wip'd away.

ROWE.

RAPID as unforeseen were the changes that a time of civil war brought to pass in a comparatively very short period. The friend of to-day was often the enemy of to-morrow; political frenzy the cause of the change. Sometimes, from popular fury or factious rage, a man of character and courage would at one time side with the Parliament; and, on some remorse of conscience springing up, or on some concession being made on the part of the King, he would, within a day, become a Royalist again, and a zealous one in his duty. Suspicion never slept, and neither the friend nor the foe was always relied upon to be in one mind, or to remain constant to the party which either had espoused; whilst the least cause of mistrust (more especially in any man of rank in the army) was speedily magnified into one big with danger, and fraught with all the hidden mischiefs of treachery and change.

Dorothea, whose visits to my little solitary closet were, as I have before noticed, rare, had of late discontinued them, unless when she might have gained any intelligence that she fancied would pain me in the recital; so that I now never saw her open my door with a smile on her lips but I expected to receive either vexation or mortification.

One day (about six months after the interview I have related with Colonel Holborne) she came to me not smiling, but with a look of grave concern.

"What has happened, Dorothea?" I said. "For Heaven's sake, tell me, and relieve me from this suspense!"

"O, sister!" she continued, "your conduct, we fear, has destroyed Colonel Holborne, and will cost him his life."

"What do you mean? His life! impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Not impossible, nor improbable, if what Sir Arthur Mooren

has this day heard be true. It is true, as far as you are concerned, for there is no doubt about the Colonel's danger."

"What have you heard?" I said. "Tell me, I beseech you! You know how easily, of late, I am overcome by these sudden shocks."

"But you will have a greater, by and by, if Colonel Holborne loses his head, by order of the Earl of Stamford, and by your means."

"What do you mean?" I replied, aghast with terror at my own fears.

"Only this," said Dorothea, readily enough. "Sir Arthur Mooren has this day received information that Colonel Holborne saved his life and Edmund's by letting the Earl of Stamford know that he dearly valued you; that you were betrothed to him, before these unhappy wars broke out in the West; and that you would never confirm the contract between you, by giving him your hand, unless he saved the life of your father, by his influence with his own party. Colonel Holborne, therefore, implored the Earl to spare the lives of his prisoners; and he did so, though they were condemned for the Bristol plot. It seems that you, Elizabeth, wrote to the General yourself, to confirm the Colonel's letter. Is this true?" added Dorothea, fixing her quick and inquiring glance upon me, till she made me blush with her searching and unfriendly eye. "Is this true?" she repeated.

"What if it is?" I replied. "I do not deny it; it is true."

"Well, then, hear the mischief you have done," said Dorothea, "to the man who so generously saved your father's life and the life of Edmund. The Earl of Stamford, not choosing, in an affair of so much moment, to act on his own unsupported authority, sent Colonel Holborne's letter and yours to the Parliamentary Committee of the West. It seems they were suspicious of the truth of these statements; but they would not thwart the Earl of Stamford's wish to oblige his friend. Now, it appears, some months having elapsed, and nothing more being said of the Colonel's contract with you, and he having given in no account of the money, plate, or jewels found in this house, at the time of its surrender, and having some enemies also busy for his ruin, the Committee have chosen to take up the affair very seriously, and to insist that Colonel Holborne's plea about your contract with him, and all that matter, was alike idle and fictitious; that no such

engagement ever existed; and so they have at once arrested Colonel Holborne on suspicion, now converted into a positive charge of treason to the State; and, as he has many enemies, in consequence of his always showing a wish to restore the King, when he should have better counsellors, to the throne, your father says it will go hard with him, unless you can disprove the falsehood of such a charge, and save him."

"What charge can I disprove?—how save him?" I exclaimed.

"The contract pleaded by Colonel Holborne as existing between you they consider as feigned—an artifice of his own devising to carry his point. Your father thinks, therefore, that the only way in which Colonel Holborne can be delivered from his present peril is by your writing forthwith to the Earl of Stamford such a letter as he may lay before the Committee, confirming the truth of all the Colonel's former statements; and expressing your earnest desire to fulfil the contract."

"And does my father really think that, by such a step, I could save him?—save Colonel Holborne, who must otherwise die for his generosity to us? Dorothea, can you, as you shall answer it to God, can you say that our father truly thinks this?"

"He does," she replied; "he has no doubt of it. In doing so, Elizabeth, he bade me say you would do no more than you are already in common honesty bound to do for the Colonel."

"Leave me, Dorothea," I said; "leave me—I will try to do right. But I must first consider the consequences of such an act. Leave me." I waved my hand as I spoke, desirous to be rid of her. I will not say it was in order to gain time for deliberation that I wished her to leave me; because, in such a crisis as this, all deliberation was unnecessary. My own heart told me at once what to do, and I determined to follow its dictates. But in doing right, in opposition to the dictates of my own strong affections, I felt there was magnanimity; and, as I knew but too well how incapable was Dorothea of all noble thoughts or feelings, I could not bear that she should witness what I then felt—the mingled emotions of generosity and weakness—the struggle with which I was about to make the Sacrifice. I knew, in order to save Colonel Holborne, *it must be complete;* since, did he suspect it

would cost me but one pang to yield the hand I was about to give him, nay, to offer him, such was the generosity of his nature I felt convinced he would rather meet death on the scaffold than me at the altar.

Not wishing to pause an instant in doing what I knew to be right, I did but ejaculate a few words, imploring God's assistance through this most anxious task; and (carried on by an enthusiasm, an elevation of purpose, which, for the time, seemed to raise me above the weakness of my own heart, above every selfish feeling) I sat down in the very chair in which I had been seated, and at the same escritoire where, by the dictation of the Colonel, I had written to the Earl of Stamford to save my father's life; and now wrote to the Earl myself, to save the life of the man who had been the preserver of that father and his friend.

A more difficult task yet remained for me; the letter that I must write to the Colonel himself. I could not be insincere to such a man. I entertained so much respect, such a veneration for his worth, for his most generous conduct to me, that I should have felt it as an insult to the magnanimity of his spirit to write what might be considered even to border on falsehood; yet I could not, I dared not, tell him all the truth—that my heart was still weak, still loved, and fondly loved, Edmund.

Thus perplexed, I determined to write as candidly as I could under such painful circumstances; and, as I felt a cheerfulness, an elevation of soul, in doing what I knew to be right, I rejoiced I could assure him of the sincerity of my feelings. This, then, was my letter.

"Moortown, Wednesday night.

"COLONEL HOLBORNE,

"If I were about to address me to any but yourself on the subject of this letter, I should feel abashed, and greatly apprehensive; I should fear censure. But with you, sir, I have no fears; your own nature is no noble that you will judge me by yourself, and credit what I say as truth.

"I have learnt, with much concern, your danger. For whose sake it was incurred I well know; and under what circumstances I never can forget. Well do I also know that, not to save your own life would you desire to preserve it at the cost of my peace. Sir, I have never wilfully de-

ceived you. You knew the weakness of my heart, in respect to another, and, knowing, pitied it. That other is unfortunate, and I shall never see him more. I forbear, therefore, to blame him; as there is something in misfortune that should move our charity, even where we cannot altogether think either the suffering or the misfortune undeserved. Whatever injury he did me, I forgive him—may he be happy!

Sir, I have not forgotten what you required of me, nor what I promised; and now is the time for the fulfilment of the same. I rejoice I can so fulfil my word that neither your delicacy nor your generous care for my happiness need suffer. It becomes not the dignity of a woman, and more especially of a young woman, to deviate from those rules which custom and education have made natural to her and to her sex. I hope, therefore, you will do me the justice to attribute to this cause, and not to any want of feeling for you, my silence on many points that I know you would desire to be acquainted with. Be satisfied, noblest and most generous of men, when I say that, in the letter which goes with this to confirm the truth of our contract to the Earl of Stamford, and to assure him I am not averse to its fulfilment, I have spoken as my own feelings led me to speak—truly, sincerely; and that, in giving you my hand, in confirmation thereof, you will receive with it a heart filled with gratitude towards you, which I humbly hope, through God's assistance, you may never find wanting in its duty to you, and that in due course it may become all you could wish in

"ELIZABETH MOOREN."

The Earl of Stamford and the Committee of the West were so perfectly satisfied that the Colonel had dealt sincerely with them, and had obtained nothing from Sir Arthur Mooren but the promise of his daughter for a wife, that, in order, as they said, to clear both gentlemen in the sight of all honest men, they fined them both, and my father so heavily, for what they called his old malignancy, that he was obliged to part with all the money he had saved, and no inconsiderable portion of his land, to pay the fine, and avoid an imprisonment in Rougemont Castle.

CHAPTER XVII.

Thy sister's naught. O, Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here.
SHAKSPERE.

Do not fancy, Paulina, that I was so weak as wilfully to indulge in vain regrets. I was married—married to a good man, whom I honoured and esteemed, and who loved me but too well. I had done right. But now, alas! did I feel, that to do right and to feel right is not always the same thing. My mind, no longer raised by the enthusiasm which carries us through all difficulties attendant on an act that we consider a sacrifice to virtue—no longer alarmed for the life of the man who had saved my father—no longer struggling, or called on for exertion—I sank into the calm of certainty: I had leisure for retrospection.

Then the thought of Edmund (who, in spite of all he had done, I felt assured loved me, even at the very moment he quitted me for ever) would force itself upon me. The thoughts of what would be his sufferings when he heard I was another's came with fearful presage to my mind. Bitter was the struggle to suppress such thoughts—bitter as vain. And then the difficulty of concealing my inward and cankering care from the observation of my most affectionate husband, who, kind and considerate as he was, having wished that I should do no violence to my own feelings, whilst I was the mistress of my own fate, I feared would deem it culpable (however involuntary) in his wife did she suffer her thoughts to look back with any regretful recollections of the past.

The circumstances of the times, however, favoured my attempts at concealing from observation the deep melancholy that preyed upon my heart, as the renewed disturbances of the West called my husband much away from me. But with my friends, and even with common acquaintances, I had no easy part to sustain; for though there was now neither secret agitation nor suspense to disturb my outward frame, as well as to affect my inward soul, there was, I felt conscious, that dullness, that dead weight upon the spirits, which could scarcely be roused into action in the course of ordinary life. I felt as if weighed down to the earth by that calm but deep

despondency which tells the tale of hope extinct, of blighted affection. I was occasionally startled from this lethargy of existence by trifles that gave me the severest shocks at the moment, if they came unexpectedly upon me. I could compare them to nothing but the sudden stings and throes of some mortal disease, by which the torpor of the sufferer or the dying is alone roused into consciousness. With what a sickening of the heart did I now hear each smiling friend who approached me wish me joy, when all joy was dead to me! The way of duty was before me; I had entered upon that narrow track. But oh, how dark and wretched did it look to me!

Yet, notwithstanding this, I can truly say I never wilfully indulged these morbid and most distressing feelings. Though they were frequently too much for me, they were strongly combated: the struggle was lengthened, but never abandoned; and prayer to God that he would help me in it, and finally enable me to conquer my own sad thoughts, was daily offered up. All the little tokens I possessed of Edmund's affection that could call up a tear or a softening recollection of him, were carefully put out of sight, with something of the same feeling with which we consign to the earth and bid a last farewell to the remains of one beloved, on whom we can no longer look but with unspeakable sorrow.

Even the very books Edmund and I had read together were put aside; for the memory of him who had given such a charm to them, by the tone of his voice and the feeling with which he read, would have revived emotions it was now my duty to suppress. The songs that I had sung with him were also put away: I could not bear them. Nothing can so instantaneously awake the slumbering feelings, or strike upon the deepest chord of the heart, as music. One note of a dearly remembered air will upset all the resignation, the philosophy of months. I dared not expose my feelings to such a trial.

One day, when I was more than usually calm and composed, and had begun to hope that a contented fulfilment of my duty was yet reserved for me, I met with a circumstance the most unexpected and the most unfortunate to which I could, at such a time, be exposed.

I wanted to speak with my stepsister on some common matter of household concernment (for I was still at Moortown), and not finding her where I expected, in the withdrawing-

room, I passed on to her closet, thinking she was there. It seemed as if she had been suddenly called off whilst arranging some of her papers; for several lay scattered on the table, and two or three drawers of her cabinet were partially open.

In passing near it, my eye by chance rested on one of the half-open drawers. With what strange and mingled feelings did I perceive, lying on the top of some loose papers, a miniature of Edmund! I looked and shuddered. I was indeed surprised, as I did not know, till that moment, that a miniature which had been painted of Edmund for his beloved friend, my late brother, whilst they were abroad, was in the possession of Dorothea. I concluded it must have been taken by her from my brother's effects, which were forwarded to England after his death.

Though, as I have said, I had carefully put aside even the veriest trifle that could remind me of him, and had his picture belonged to me I should never have dared to look upon it, yet, now that it came so unexpectedly before me, there was a fascination in it which riveted me to the spot; I could not withdraw my eyes from it; and I welcomed the accident that had thus given me the sight of a long-lost friend.

I snatched the picture from the drawer. I gazed upon it with deep feeling, till, blinded by my tears, I could no longer see the lineaments of that face, once so dear to me, and all the thoughts of the many happy days and hours we had passed together, all the thousand circumstances of the past crowded on my mind in a manner the most overpowering. I forgot where I was; and sinking into a chair, still holding in my hand the picture, I gave way to a burst of sorrow it was impossible to combat or control. Long, however, I did not indulge in it; the thought how wrong was all this soon came to my mind, and caused me to make a great effort to recover my self-possession. I rose to return the miniature to its place, with a determination never to look on it again. As I was about to do so, a paper that lay in the same drawer, *in my own handwriting*, caught my eye. Being in my own hand, I was not restrained by the thought that I had no right to touch it, as it was obvious nothing could be a secret to me which was written by myself. I almost unconsciously took it up.

O, Heaven! how shall I speak my feelings when I looked at it! Had a viper suddenly started up and stung me, I

could not have received a greater shock. A sudden pang of horror, like the stroke of death, struck my heart, when I beheld in that paper my own copy of the letter I had written to the Earl of Stamford (at the time I wished to save my father and Edmund), by the desire of Colonel Holborne—the letter wherein I had declared my engagement to the Colonel, and my wish to fulfil it. I had locked this copy in my own cabinet; it must have been stolen thence by Dorothea in one of the many visits of curiosity which, about that time, she paid to me. On one occasion, I had complained to her of something being the matter with the key of my cabinet, when, to my surprise, I had found it unlocked.

No sooner did I now find the copy of my own letter in her possession than the conviction flashed across my mind that she had shown it, under the seal of secrecy, to Edmund. Hence all his strange conduct towards me. He had been persuaded, by the sight of my own letter to the Earl of Stamford, that I really desired and purposed to be the wife of Colonel Holborne; that I was false to himself, had cruelly played with his feelings, and altogether deceived him. Yet, bound by the promise Dorothea had drawn from him, he could not tell me by what means he had come to this most fatal conclusion, on the strength of which he had abandoned me for ever.

The recollection of his half-frantic conduct, his bitter reproaches, his last farewell, all crowded on my mind. I felt certain that I had been cruelly, wilfully misrepresented and betrayed by Dorothea; betrayed with a view to separate me for ever from the heart and hopes of Edmund; so that, when time should have softened the wound, she might win him for herself; for I had long seen she secretly loved him with a passion as selfish as it was mean; since she scrupled not to desire to possess the hand of the man whose heart she well knew had been denied her.

Whilst I held in my hand the very letter which had thus been used to bring about the ruin of Edmund and all my dearest hopes; agonized beyond all expression at the thought of his having so unjustly deemed me false; agitated, trembling, my mind bordering on distraction, when I also thought, now that I was the wife of another, how impossible it was I could, in this particular, do even common justice to myself, my cruel enemy, Dorothea, unexpectedly entered the

room. She looked surprised, but, glancing her eye on me, then on the paper I held, and on the open drawer—that seldom slow accuser, *Conscience*, in an instant, told her all the truth; there was no need of words between us to speak the feelings, the confusion, either of the betrayer or the betrayed; our looks spoke all we felt.

But, in spite of her vexation to think that, by her own negligence, she had exposed herself to me, malice was at this moment the predominating feeling expressed in the countenance of Dorothea; shame or remorse had no part in it.

"How careless was I to leave yonder drawer open!" she said, quickly; and, as if she would turn the current of those just reproaches I was about to cast upon her by endeavouring to throw blame on me, she added, sneeringly, "I see you have been handling Edmund's portrait. Colonel Holborne would not much thank his wife for the tears she has been dropping upon the picture of a former lover—see, they are still wet upon the glass."

"Unfeeling, cruel woman!" I said—"for I will not call you sister—you, who have brought about so much ruin—you do well to scoff at me. O, Dorothea! think you that the justice of Heaven will slumber at this? In what did I ever injure you, that you should be my enemy? I know you have been my enemy." She was about to speak. "Nay," I continued, "do not add the sin of falsehood to all that is gone before; do not contradict it—I can see it all, know it all; your curiosity was excited as to what passed between Colonel Holborne and myself the day he was with me in my closet. I refused to tell you—you watched me; and, when the opportunity occurred, you stole from my cabinet this copy of my letter to the Earl of Stamford, and, to work my ruin, you showed it to Edmund. You made him believe it was a proof of my falsehood; you succeeded in your work. Rejoice, Dorothea, rejoice—nothing is wanting to your wishes—all has prospered; you are no unskilful contriver. Edmund left me—left me for ever; and I am the wife of another! Now, Dorothea, now rejoice; see the wronged sister—look on the betrayed friend! See the wretch you have made in me!"

Again did I sink into a seat, and burst into an agony of tears; so strong was my grief that the very chair in which I sat shook with the convulsive movement of my whole frame.

There is something in the sight of deep grief that is overawing. Strong wicked characters at once brave the shame that guilt has brought upon them; timid ones quail before it, and require time and thought to bring their spirit up to the point of defiance. Dorothea was of the latter class. She now, therefore, felt fear when she beheld the state of almost frantic grief to which I was driven by the discovery of her artifice. She had recourse to the usual shift of an unprincipled mind—the shift of sophistry to excuse what she had done, since she saw how vain it would be to deny it.

She affected to believe that, at the time she had by chance seen my letter in my escritoire (even, she said, as I had now by chance seen it in the drawer of her cabinet), I really did not regard Edmund, and preferred Colonel Holborne; that I had grown tired of my simple pledge to the former, which had been contrary to my father's will; and she fancied she was doing me a service when she endeavoured, by showing it to Edmund in secret, to prevail with him to give me up; and was also doing no less a service to him, when she tried to cure him of an unhappy and hopeless affection. She was, she said, much grieved by it; but how could she know, if I really preferred Edmund, that I would be prevailed on by Colonel Holborne to resort to artifice, even to preserve the lives of my nearest and dearest; and to write to the Earl of Stamford what I knew was not truth. For her part, she had always thought I prided myself so much on being above all subterfuge, that she had not suspected I would have used it on any occasion; more especially in favour of a man I did not wish to wed."

"You do well, Dorothea," I said, "to reproach me thus. It is too true; artifice is always a snare to those who condescend to use it, be it for a good or an ill purpose; and we are expressly taught that we are not to do evil that good may come of it. I am indeed caught in my own net; I was prevailed on to write what I felt to be insincere; and see the result! My own letter has been used as a snare to betray me—to ruin the unhappy Edmund; and Colonel Holborne, who prevailed with me to write it, has gained by it what he would never have desired to possess, could he have known it—a wife whose hand was pledged to him without her heart! Such is the end of artifice; it makes its own chastisement; such is my Sacrifice. But this,

Dorothea, cannot excuse you—you knew the truth; nay, you did know it; all you say cannot remove that conviction from my mind; and, though you might condemn me for what I did, yet you, Dorothea, as a sister, though but a sister in name, should at least have excused it, and not have turned my fault, like the edge of a sword, against my own bosom, when you knew I had erred in the hope to save a father's life."

"It is useless to recriminate," said Dorothea.

"It is so, indeed," I replied; "but, O, Dorothea, what must be that heart which could thus betray a sister and a friend!"

Dorothea was one of those persons who, even on the most glaring conviction, never admit they can do wrong. Contradiction, denial, provocation, were the usual weapons with which she rebutted any charge; and, when unable to make any one of these tell, she would at once turn round upon her adversary, drag in some subject foreign to the matter of complaint, and become the accuser instead of the accused. Even so did she now.

"At this very moment," she said, "when you are reproaching me, I am thinking how to do you service; thinking how much it is necessary that not you alone, but that I should be upon my guard to conceal from Colonel Holborne the fact that his wife is giving her thoughts, with the bitterness of regret, to another. A husband, Elizabeth, would hardly brook the knowledge of such regrets, or deem his wife guiltless who entertained them. But do not fear me. Reproach me as you will; I can forgive—I will not betray you."

This last speech was made with an air of affected superiority, with such pretension to a generous forgiveness, as if I had been the sole offender and she the injured party, that, notwithstanding all my experience of the character of Dorothea, I was astonished at the daring spirit she now displayed in doing wrong. Yet, knowing how vain it was to reason with one who would not be convinced, I only said, "Dorothea, I am shocked at the hardness of heart you now betray. Talk of forgiveness to me! But it is vain to argue with you. May God forgive you, and teach you a better spirit! that is all the ill I wish you. For myself, I have not, I cannot forget I am a wife—by your means, a most unhappy wife. Yet I trust, with the help of a good Providence, that I shall be

enabled to observe my duty to Colonel Holborne as a husband better than you have observed yours to me as a sister. I will no longer stay, either to reproach you or to be reproached by you. Farewell. May God soften your heart before it is too late! May he bring you to a better mind!" So saying, I left her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Great souls forgive not injuries till time
Has put their enemies into their power,
That they may show forgiveness is their own.
DRYDEN.

There's nothing in this world can make me joy:
Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man.
SHAKSPERE.

BEFORE I made this dreadful discovery of the treachery of Dorothea, my spirits and my health had both been weakened by a long and anxious state of suffering. No wonder, therefore, on receiving so sudden and violent a shock, I was wholly unequal to the task of a renewed struggle. The result was, I became so ill that I entertained the serious belief that I should be released by death from all my earthly cares.

In this state, and not knowing but I might be called to my account before Colonel Holborne could return to see me, unwilling to quit the world whilst the slightest circumstance that could affect him remained untold (worthy as he was of all my confidence), I determined to leave in writing a full statement of every particular respecting Edmund; all my early feelings for him; the manner in which he had quitted me, and my discovery of Dorothea's treachery.

Having written this confession, I concluded with humbly and fervently begging God's pardon and my husband's pardon for all that had been wrong either in my conduct or my heart; and assured him that, but for the previous unhappy engagement of my affections, so deep was my reverence for his character, so strong my sense of the gratitude I felt for his kindness towards me, I should have chosen him in prefer-

ence to all the world. As it was I hoped my sufferings and repentance for my faults and errors might in some degree plead my excuse, and that he would remember me when I was dead with no other feelings than those of pity and compassion. This task accomplished, I sealed my letter, and, addressing the envelope to Colonel Holborne, I deposited it in a private drawer that opened with a spring, in a cabinet that stood in my bedroom. Then, no longer called upon for exertion, I sank under the pressure of so many accumulated trials; the fever, which had hitherto been low, became acute, and I was delirious for many days. My father, Lady Mooren, and even the cruel Dorothea, were alarmed, and thought I could not possibly survive many days. Colonel Holborne (then far away, engaged on public matters with the great Committee of Westminster, and anxious if his suggestions could prevail to bring about a peace) was sent for with all speed, to hasten down to the West and attend upon a dying wife.

Before his arrival, however, the crisis came on, my senses returned; yet, such was my weakness, the case was still deemed by all, and more especially by myself, hopeless. Thinking I had but a few hours, perhaps, to live—for, so great was my weakness, I could not raise my head from the pillow without assistance, and could speak only a few sentences in the lowest voice—no sooner did I see my husband enter the room, with looks of unutterable distress painted in every feature of his face, than I begged all present might leave us, as I had something to say to him alone, something that would not let me die in peace if it were unspoken. I was obeyed.

With a look of anxious curiosity, yet mingled with the tenderest consideration for my sufferings, my husband came to the bedside, took my hand in his, and implored me not to disturb myself on his account with the recital of anything that could distress me. He knew my heart, he said; he should be satisfied even with anything that might be unexplained, because he knew that in all things I was worthy.

Generosity such as this made me but feel the more deeply how guilty it was in me to conceal the least thought from such a man. Yet was I so overcome with weakness and sorrow that I could only speak a few words. I repeated that I could not die in peace till he knew all, and had forgiven

me; that the secret was in the cabinet, in writing; and I asked him to take out and read the manuscript.

He did so. I sank back on my pillow, and, with a calmness which seemed to me at the moment as the forerunner of death, but probably was the result of feeling that I had now done all I could do in the wish to act right towards him, I watched every change, every look of my beloved husband's face, as he drew forth and read, and with painful emotion, the paper which revealed to him so much.

At first he seemed shocked—overpowered, and, as if the agitation of his mind had extended itself to his whole frame, he sank into a seat after he had read but a few lines, and went on to the close without uttering one word. He then cast on me a look—oh! what a look! I can see it now; never can the recollection of it be effaced from my mind! It was a look of tenderness—of reproach, but, oh! how mingled with pity! Fearful to distress me, I saw he made a strong effort to try to speak without betraying his emotion, but he could not. He folded his hands together, closed his eyes, his lips moved, and he seemed engaged in mental prayer. He then arose, paced up and down the room in great agitation; some contest, some struggle, seemed to shake his inmost soul. Some slight tokens of indecision appeared also in his manner, for he would now approach the bed as if he would speak to me, then retreat, and then again advance, whilst once or twice his lips moved, but no voice came. At length, whatever might be his internal struggles, they were subdued, and an air of calm determination once more restored to those hitherto disturbed features a look of composure and of peace. He now softly approached me, seated himself by my bedside, leaned gently forward, and again took my cold and trembling hand within his, as he said—

"Be composed, my Elizabeth, be composed; you have done right; you have been ingenuous; let the consciousness of that support you. You ask my forgiveness; you have done me no wrong. I have nothing to forgive. But yet, if the fear of what, on your part, was, I am persuaded, an involuntary offence, and one never wilfully indulged in, can still distress you—and if to hear me say (as in the sight of God and of my own heart I can with perfect truth say) that I forgive it—if that can be any relief to your mind, know, my dearest Elizabeth, I as freely pardon you as I hope God will

pardon me for my many offences. May He bless my wife, my dear Elizabeth!"

"O, this is too much—too much!" I said. "How can I support generosity such as this, knowing how ill I have deserved it!"

"No more of self-reproach," he said; "no more of that. By reproaching yourself you deprive me of my reward, the thought that I have restored peace to your heart. And now," he added, "I have some intelligence to communicate to you that will deeply interest you; but, for my sake, you must endeavour to hear it with composure, for I will believe, my beloved wife, my Elizabeth, that you love me." And a sweet smile played on his lips as he endeavoured to reassure and to raise my sinking heart.

"I will believe," he continued, "you wish to live, to make me happy. You must not, then, disturb the calm, that I bless Heaven for having restored to you, by any fresh alarms. Can you hear news, good news, of poor Edmund Oxenham with composure? If so, I have somewhat to tell you about him."

So great was my weakness, from recent illness and agitation, that I could not help bursting into tears, as I thanked him again and again for his kindness, his consideration, and assured him I would endeavour to listen with composure.

"Well, then," said Colonel Holborne, "Edmund has not gone to America. How or wherefore he was detained I do not know. But certain it is he is still in England; and is at this time not very far from this house; having been appointed to negotiate with the Royalists some business respecting an exchange of prisoners. He is safe, though in the midst of his enemies, being as an envoy protected by a flag of truce."

I heard this with much emotion; and now, having no feelings that I would wish to hide from my husband, I did not hesitate expressing my thankfulness to God, on hearing that Edmund was still alive.

"It was not, however, merely to let you know of his safety that I mentioned him," continued the Colonel. "I have another purpose. Tell me, dearest Elizabeth, and do not fear to tell me all the truth—for, indeed, you have no cause to fear—tell me, was it the thought that Edmund believed you to be false, that you had wilfully broken your plighted

faith with him to marry me, was it this which preyed on your heart in secret, and has all but destroyed your life? Tell me, O, tell me, was it this?"

"It was, indeed," I said; "I cannot deceive you—can you pardon me?"

"I have pardoned all—do not talk of me," replied Colonel Holborne; "answer me but this—would you wish Edmund to know the truth? all the truth—the cause of your writing that letter to the Earl of Stamford; and by what base means Dorothea obtained the copy of it, to betray both you and himself—would you be happier did Edmund know this, and that you have never wilfully deceived him?"

"I should be happier," I said, "did he know the truth; then would my heart be at peace."

"He shall know it, then," said Colonel Holborne, "and from me. Cost what it may to my own feelings, he shall know it. Elizabeth, I will do you justice. My testimony cannot be questioned when given thus against myself. I will seek him to tell him that you became my wife under no circumstances of falsehood to him; but under those which reflect the highest credit on the goodness of your heart, that in giving yourself to me, after he had for ever resigned you, you were guilty of no dishonour; for he was in truth preferred to me."

The tears started to Colonel Holborne's eyes at this moment, his breast seemed to swell, and his lips to quiver with emotion.

"Yes, Elizabeth," he continued, "to do you justice I can say all this. Only support yourself; take comfort to your heart; live for my sake; and I will do it."

"O! how can I speak my feelings," I exclaimed; "how requite a generosity so exalted as this! But where are you going?" I added, seeing he arose and was about to quit the room. "Where are you going?"

"Do not ask," he replied, "till I know the result. Be composed, my dearest wife. Live, and we may yet be happy. Farewell!"

Colonel Holborne waved his hand and left me. He was not absent more than a few hours. His goodness, I am convinced, more than all else, gave a favourable turn to my disease; for that night I became better, calmer; the pulse abated, and there was the hope of life renewed. In the

evening my husband returned. He entered my chamber with a serenity spread over every feature of his most open and expressive face, yet with an air of melancholy too marked to escape observation. I longed to hear what had passed; yet I could not summon resolution enough to ask the question; my stepmother was in the room.

Colonel Holborne came up to the bedside, took my hand in his, pressed it warmly, and said softly as he stooped his head to kiss me: "To-morrow I will tell you all. I have seen Edmund; he is satisfied—he sends his blessing to you; to-morrow you will hear from him; he will write to you—Good night."

He left the room. The few words he had spoken were as a balm to my wounded mind. I slept; and awoke so refreshed in the morning that the hopes of my recovery were confirmed. I did not see Colonel Holborne till noon. With the utmost kindness he told me briefly (for he confessed the subject was too painful for him to dwell upon it) that, on the previous evening, he had obtained a private interview with Edmund; those about him supposing that the Colonel came on public affairs. He begged me to spare him the detail of all that had passed, and assured me he had done me ample justice. All was explained, and Edmund convinced of my truth; he was deeply affected, but satisfied.

"And I," added Colonel Holborne, "I was unmanned; for O! Elizabeth, I could not tell him unmoved that you had loved him more than me, and that, had I known the truth, I would have sacrificed myself to secure your happiness."

I was about to speak.

"Do not speak," he continued. "Edmund was deeply affected. He has written to you, and enclosed the letter in one to me. Here are both letters."

I took the paper, unfolded the first, and read as follows:—

"To Colonel Holborne, these, &c.

"COLONEL HOLBORNE,

"I inclose you a letter, and you will know to *whom* to deliver it. I have to ask of you that its contents be not known to any one, nor that such a letter hath been sent. You know my feelings on the subject, and the motive I have in sending it. Shall I say it? There is but one being in the world to

whom I would send it. I add no more, but that you have ever the best wishes of yours, in all sincerity,

"EDMUND OXENHAM."

(*Copy of the letter inclosed.*)

"You will not be more surprised at receiving a letter from me than I am at writing it. But the cause of my breaking this long silence is one which I conceive to be an act of justice to you and to myself. Time has softened down the harshness of passionate resentment, and the conversation of last night has affected me more than I would wish to say. What I did, though in anger, was natural, when so cruelly misled and deceived by Dorothea, and my deception confirmed by the sight of your own letter. Judge me impartially, as a human being born with strong passions and frailties, and you will acquit me. But my resentments, for what I conceived to be a wilful breach of faith in you, have long since died away. Persecuted as I have been in this sad world, with now neither hopes nor prospects but such as hang on a better, I would fain make my peace with all, and, retiring into myself, forget that such things were. The time, I hope, may come, when I shall be able to look on the past with a steadier eye; at present I would avoid it, lest it should throw a darker shadow over all the future.

"But I feel that it gives me some consolation to assure you how freely I forgive you for all the share you have had in it. I am ready to believe that the letter you wrote to the Earl of Stamford arose from the necessity of the case—your father's danger; that you did not act wilfully from a wrong motive towards me. Be assured no unkind feeling exists towards you in my breast. No, Elizabeth; this is most likely the last time you will ever hear from me. From the bottom of my soul do I forgive you all the bitter, bitter hours I have passed. Misfortune and disappointment have ever marked my days; this was the keystone to the whole, and has marred all chance of future happiness. May you be happier than I have been, as happy as your own wishes would make you! Be at ease with regard to me; whatever are my feelings they are not such as would injure you; no, not even in thought. Again

I say, be happy. That the God of all Mercy may bless you and keep you is the sincere prayer of the unfortunate—unfortunate

"EDMUND OXENHAM."

It would be impossible for me to describe what were my feelings on reading this letter. For some time I let my tears flow without control. My husband spoke with regret of the resolution which he told me Edmund had taken, and communicated to him, never again to quit the field of active service so long as a man remained in arms for the King, should the war be renewed, as both parties believed it would be, on the expiration of the present truce in the West.

Deeply as I was affected by the sufferings of Edmund, I was no less so by the generous manner in which my husband had conducted himself, from the promptings of his own heart, throughout the whole of these most disastrous events. His magnanimity worked a great change in my mind, and my bodily health speedily partook of its salutary effects. It raised me from the bed of death to renewed life—to renewed hope. I felt I had a duty paramount to all others to perform, and my very sense of the necessity of its fulfilment did me service, for nothing less than the devotion of my whole life to the affectionate cares of a wife could, I felt, in any way requite the debt I owed to my noble-minded husband. Yes! I felt that the only return adequate to his merit was to love him, and I determined, with all the energy of my soul, to endeavour to effect that object, so that Duty and Love might go hand in hand. Never could I think of what he had done for me without a feeling of admiration for his virtue, for the greatness and disinterestedness of mind, that carried with it a fervour and enthusiasm of itself sufficient to kindle in my heart the liveliest gratitude. What motives were these to enforce a sense of duty! I soon found that duty, based on what is right in the eye of God, when once resolutely entered upon, was more easy of performance than we are apt to think, if, at the first, it happens not altogether to harmonise with our own feelings. To fulfil any duty is obedience to God; it has in it all that is good and reasonable to recommend it, and with humble confidence we may rely on the Divine grace to aid us in the work.

CHAPTER XIX.

I know not how it is;
But a foreboding presses on my heart,
At times, until I sicken. I have heard—
And from men learned—that before the touch
(The common, coarser touch) of good or ill,
That oftentimes a subtler sense informs
Some spirits of the approach of "things to be."

PROCTOR.

'Tis credible on record that good men
Have awful warnings.

HUNT.

ONE day, during my convalescence, but before I had quitted my chamber, as I was reclining in an easy chair to which I had been moved from my bed, I sat opposite a window, contemplating the setting sun, that slowly and with great majesty and beauty was sinking below the distant hills. After I had ceased to see the globe of fire which had been so dazzling in its decline, I still perceived a mass of clouds, that retained on their edges a tinge of red and gold, though the shades of twilight were falling fast around, and involving every object in their obscurity.

As I thus sat contemplating the scene without, something suddenly and violently dashed itself against the glass of the window without. I looked and beheld a bird (but of what kind I could not tell), with outspread and agitated wings, whose breast was of the purest white. It fluttered a few moments before the window, and then disappeared. I did not see in what direction it flew. The nurse, also, on hearing the fluttering, looked up, and exclaimed, as she did so, in a voice that made me shudder, "It is the white-breasted bird of Oxenham. I have seen that bird once before, on the night when Mr. Edmund's mother died, for I was then living in the family; that bird is never seen but one of the house of Oxenham dies. Yet it is strange it should flutter before your window; though, I have heard say, it will sometimes appear to the friend best beloved by him who is about to depart this world, as well as to the individual himself for whom the warning comes."

I heard no more; for, weakened as I was in spirits as well as body, I fainted, as a cold sense of fear ran through my

veins, and seemed to chill my very heart, at the thought that rushed on my mind—for whose death the warning was thus given! It was some time before I was restored to consciousness.

Not many days after, about the same hour at which I had seen the bird so mysteriously fluttering around my window, whilst I was seated in the same place, and again contemplating the same scene, my husband entered the room with a noiseless step. He approached me with a silence and solemnity of manner and of aspect that was alarming. He looked at me with tender pity, and seemed as if collecting himself ere he commenced a subject which he knew would give me pain. But, before he could utter a single word, my feelings told me all. I could not speak. I could but clasp my hands together and look up in his face, as, at length, I found words to say—"You come to tell me that Edmund is dead."

"Indeed, I do," he replied: "but how could it be known to you? The messenger who brought the fatal news has but this moment arrived."

"No messenger of earth conveyed the tidings to me," I said; "but a winged messenger, permitted, I doubt not, of Heaven to warn me. You have heard the old tale of the house of Oxenham?"

"I have," said my husband with agitation. "Have you, then, seen the white-breasted bird?"

"Two nights ago," I replied, "about this time, that messenger of fate came to yonder window."

"It was, then, on the very day, and about the very hour, he died," said my husband. "Elizabeth, can you bear to hear it all? Speak."

"Tell me all!" I exclaimed; "God, who permitted the mysterious warning to be given, will enable me to bear this trial; let me, then, know all the truth. Hide nothing from me. Where did he fall? In battle, and for the King?"

"He fell in battle, and gloriously. It appears that after he had despatched the farewell letter he wrote to you, no longer detained by any duty here, he mounted his horse, and, having heard that the King was about to take the field in person, hastened to join him. The name, the zeal, the loyalty of Edmund Oxenham were well known to the unfortunate Charles. He granted at once Edmund's request that he

might have the honour to be stationed near the Royal presence in the field. The battle took place near Newbury. The King was in the heart of the action. But his Majesty's cause failed, and a decisive victory was achieved by the Parliament. Edmund fought with the most daring courage in defence of his Royal master. He never quitted his sovereign's side till the last moment before the unhappy Charles was compelled to retreat from the field. Edmund received a blow from a sword and was borne bleeding from the ground by some of his men, who rallied round him. Fortunately there was a farmhouse not very far distant from the spot. Thither was he carried, his wound examined, and pronounced mortal.

Edmund, though sinking from the loss of blood, desired some friend near him to search in a pocket of the coat he had worn. He said a letter would be found in it which he had written on the previous night to Sir Arthur Mooren, as he knew he should die in this battle, for he had received a warning of his death which, by one of his house, could never be mistaken. He paused, and added something which, he was so faint, could scarcely be understood. But the words, '*white-breasted bird*' were distinctly spoken. The letter was to request he might be buried in the church where he had been accustomed to attend divine service with Sir Arthur and his family. He then prayed fervently, though inarticulately, and in a few minutes expired. So fled the best, the bravest spirit that ever animated a human breast. O! Elizabeth, if I feel this, what must be your sorrow!"

The remains of Edmund were committed to their last resting-place as he had desired; my father attending as chief mourner, and a true mourner was he indeed. He had dearly loved the unhappy Edmund, and now more than ever estimated his worth. I recovered, though slowly, from my severe illness; for I was young, and was endowed with a naturally good constitution; and the kindness of my husband, my deep sense of gratitude and duty towards him for all his generous care, with the consolations of a religious trust, altogether supported me through the repeated trials and shocks to which I was exposed.

I recovered; but there was one in our family who never did, and that one was—Dorothea. She had resolved to pay Edmund's remains the last tribute of respect by following them

to the grave. My father combated her purpose; but she would go. The day proved unfavourable; it was wet, and the church damp and cold. So much had Dorothea been absorbed by her own sad thoughts and feelings that she took not even the commonest precautions against the inclemency of the day. She returned home, felt chilled, but complained to no one, grew worse, and at length confessed her state of suffering, both in body and mind.

Stung to the very soul by a late but deep sense of remorse, she seemed wholly careless of the result of her illness. Soon did it become serious. Fever came on with rapid strides; and in less than ten days, after asking and receiving my forgiveness, the unhappy Dorothea yielded her last breath, perfectly sensible, and deploring, to the latest moment of her existence, the cruel manner in which she had deceived Edmund about myself. She died penitent, but unconsoled; for she never could forgive herself, though, I doubt not, her true repentance had obtained for her God's mercy and forgiveness.

I remained so weak, and my spirits were so much affected, that it was proposed I should be removed to the house of my husband's sister on the sea-coast, for the benefit of the change. Paulina, to you I need relate none of the events which there occurred.

Some years have intervened since I there made you the promise, which I have here, with a sacred regard to truth, fulfilled. You know not how many causes, duties, and cares have arisen to occasion this delay in the execution of my most painful task. Among these have been the cruel circumstances which attended the close of the Civil War; that war in which I lost my dear father in the last great battle fought by the Royalists. My dear husband also was a sufferer. For, though he had served but too faithfully the Parliament party he had espoused, he was at last most ungratefully requited by his rebel and disloyal masters. In consequence of his having absolutely refused to accede to the measures adopted to secure the King's person (which were followed by his imprisonment and death), Colonel Holborne was not only discarded but persecuted by Cromwell and the Republicans. Compelled by the circumstances of the times and the ill-usage he received to leave the country for some years, I bore him company;

nor did we return to England till after the restoration of the monarchy.

Then was it, I rejoice to say, that I was enabled in some measure to repay my debt of gratitude to my dear husband. The daughter of the known and gallant Royalist, Sir Arthur Mooren, who had lost his life for the late King, was heard with respect and attention when she pleaded for the pardon of her husband, and proved how he had suffered by his resolute endeavour, unavailing though it was, to save the life and crown of the unhappy Charles. Colonel Holborne's character as a brave and honourable man had ever been respected, even by his enemies: he was ultimately pardoned.

Lady Mooren having died during our residence abroad, and no heir being left but myself to the lands and old mansion of Moortown, thither we retired; and there we have lived for more than ten years, as you know, in great privacy; Colonel Holborne taking no part in public affairs, but exercising in private life, as a husband, a father, a friend, and a benefactor to his tenants and to the poor, those great and generous qualities by which he has ever been distinguished. This, Paulina, you may know; but it is impossible you should know the extent of his kindness, his tenderness, his goodness to me, his most grateful and, I hope I may with truth add, his affectionate wife; so that not a day passes over my head but I bless him, and bless God for all he has done for me. Neither my past sorrows nor the dead are forgotten, but they are now remembered by us both with the calm of a religious resignation and the hope of a Christian.

How often do I now think with devout submission on the goodness of Providence, which for so long a time conducted me in safety through all the trying circumstances of my past life! How mercifully have they been overruled and governed, when all my own attempts to guide my course were alike vain and fruitless—God ordering them as he thought fit, though contrary to my own expectations, and in a manner quite beyond my own power either to foresee or to project: now turning aside by the veriest trifles of his Providence plans of a long and anxious deliberation that seemed ripe for fruition, now raising up blessings and opening havens for hope and safety amidst the apparent ruin of those schemes of happiness that were the work of my own imagination alone. How did these thoughts teach me to adore that wondrous power

which, with infinite and never-failing mercy, orders all things for the best for those who trust Him and confide in His marvellous and inscrutable wisdom!

NOTE.—The little episode or tradition mentioned in this story arose from the following circumstance, which is thus alluded to by Prince, in his "Worthies of Devon":—"There is a family of considerable standing of this name [Oxenham] at South Tawton, near Okehampton, in the county of Devon, of which is this strange and wonderful thing recorded, that at the deaths of any of them a bird with a white breast is seen for awhile fluttering about their beds, and then suddenly to vanish away. Mr. James Howel (in his celebrated Letters) tells us that, in a lapidary's shop in London, he saw a large marble stone, to be sent into Devonshire, with an inscription, that John Oxenham, Mary Oxenham, his sister, James, his son, and Elizabeth, his mother, had each the appearance of such a bird fluttering about their beds as they were dying."

THE END.

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